



Responding to Tragic Events Guidance for Schools

Highland Council Psychological Service and Primary Mental Health
Worker Team Practice Paper

Responding To Tragic Events (v.3) -
Guidance for Schools
- Updated 2020



Review 2023

This Guidance has been updated by members of the Educational Psychology Service, Primary Mental Health Worker Team, CHAMs team, education staff and staff from Crocus. With thanks to Hannah Lind, Service Manager Crocus Group, Valerie Paterson (DHT, Fortrose Academy), to young people who attend Crocus and to all staff who provided critical feedback. Special thanks are given to the young people who attend Crocus, for providing reflective information about how to support children and young people when they are dealing with a bereavement and for giving us permission to include their Grief Brief in this Guidance.

RESPONDING TO TRAGIC EVENTS

Introduction

For the purposes of this Guidance a Tragic Event is an incident which involves the experience of personal distress to a level that has the potential to overwhelm individuals. These incidents are wide-ranging and unpredictable in their form. They include bereavement as a result of the death of a member of the school community or a serious incident which impacts upon the school community. The Guidance is **not** Critical Incident Guidance e.g. response to terrorist attack, natural disaster.

Whenever a tragedy occurs, children, like many people, may be confused or frightened. Most likely they will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. School staff can help children cope first and foremost by establishing a sense of safety and security. **Generally children recover from a Tragic Event without the direct intervention of outside agencies** – the empathetic response of family, friends and trusted adults (this includes school staff) provide the resilience to see a child through this painful process

To help staff understand how the Tragic Event might be impacting on children and young people there is general information on bereavement and grief reactions within the Guidance. Grief reactions can occur not only in relation to a bereavement but at times when we are dealing with significant changes or losses, therefore information contained within the Bereavement section of the Guidance might also be useful when dealing with a serious incident.

When dealing with a Tragic Event a flexible and sensitive range of responses is required, based on sound psychological understanding of the variety of reactions and needs of both children/young people and adults at such times. Advice within this Guidance aims to support staff and to give them the confidence to appropriately respond to children and young people at this time.

The guidance also provides information and checklists to help a school through such an event or to help with forward planning. It provides information on practical steps to take when dealing with a Tragic Event.

Change, Loss & Bereavement

Children and young people experience loss and bereavement in many different circumstances – the death of a pet, the loss of a favoured toy, a change of class, a friend moving away, are all examples of common and natural loss experiences. However, children may also be affected by more significant losses such as family bereavement, or divorce / family separation (an experience which for some might be as painful and as hurtful as a bereavement through death). Looked after children and young people, refugee and asylum-seeking children and those who have a parent in prison, may all be especially vulnerable to feelings of loss. For Looked After Children & Young People loss/grief feelings might be further impacted following placement disruptions, adoption breakdowns, removal from families, and loss of contact with parents etc. Information contained within this Guidance might support staff to help a child who is dealing with adjusting to a significant change or loss.

Within any community of children and young people, there will be some who experience the death of someone close to them - every 22 minutes in the UK a parent of dependent children dies, leaving about 41,000 bereaved children each year. Many more are bereaved of a grandparent, sibling, friend or other significant person, and, sadly, around 12,000 children die in the UK each year.

Serious Incidents

Sometimes schools and other settings for children and young people are faced with having to deal with devastating events which occur on or near the premises, and which involve or are witnessed by children or staff. Such events, occurring outside our normal life experiences, for example serious accidents, pandemic, fires etc, are likely to leave staff and young people shocked, distressed and perhaps traumatised. It is helpful in these instances to be prepared with an effective response. The latter part of this Guidance will address some of the specific issues around serious incidents but much of the general advice and strategies suggested in the previous section may be relevant in acknowledging and responding to the distress of the children and young people affected by a serious incident.

Responding to a Tragic Event

When a Tragic Event occurs, which impacts for the school community, the first point of contact for a Headteacher would be the Area Office.

Psychological Service and Primary Mental Health Worker Teams are available to support school communities at such a time. If support from either team is required schools should contact not only their liaison psychologist and /or PMHW (by phone call or e-mail) but also e-mail each service lead, phoning Psychological Service is also advised.

Schools may find it helpful to use the checklist below (Operational Guidance) when responding to a Tragic Event.

The Role of Psychological Service and Primary Mental Health Worker Team

Both Psychological Service and the Primary Mental Health Worker Team prioritise support to schools/ establishments that are dealing with a Tragic Event. Support will be proportionate to the event and will primarily be in the form of consultation and advice. The roles of the members of these teams should be identified in consultation with the school Senior Management Team.

The Psychological Service

The Highland Council Psychological Service can offer support to those likely to have important responsibilities to fulfil in the event of a tragic event following the principles below.

Principles

If required communication between the school and the Psychological Service should be established quickly and clearly. This work would usually take priority over other arrangements made by the school's liaison educational psychologist.

The work of the Psychological Service in the event of a tragic event should be guided by the following principles:

- ❖ The school's liaison psychologist will normally take primary responsibility for the work; but may be supported by other members of the Service, as well as other members of the school's extended support team e.g EP, PMHW
- ❖ Flexible and responsive support will be available in which individual and institutional needs will be carefully considered; however, school staff should be aware that direct counselling is rarely appropriate as an immediate response to a Tragic Event.
- ❖ As in all other areas of work, the **least intrusive most effective intervention** will be offered.

EP Involvement as a Result of a Tragic Event

After consultation between psychologist and Head Teacher agreed involvement may include:

- ❖ psychological advice, for example, on bereavement and grieving processes in children, on post-traumatic stress reactions or on accessing other agencies
- ❖ making resources available to schools which may be useful in supporting children, parents or staff
- ❖ being available for parents and staff
- ❖ in the longer term being available for children and young people individually or in groups if required – ***this is only an agreed role after detailed and significant consultation with the liaison EP***
- ❖ longer term follow up such as considering check-ins at significant dates following the tragic event.

Highland Council Psychological Services provides support following a model of Psychological First Aid. For information about Psychological First Aid (PFA) please see Appendix A.

(Psychological First Aid recognises that those supporting communities should themselves access support from peers if they wish. When a member of the Highland Council Psychological Service is involved in supporting a school community following a tragic event it is important that opportunities for peer support are available from within the service.)

Primary Mental Health Workers

The PMHW team will support schools, alongside the Psychological service, when a response to a tragic event is required. Every school has an allocated PMHW and any response required would take priority over planned diaries.

The PMHW team would offer advice and support to school staff and help to consider over a period of time what would be required to support families and staff who might be affected. Consultation is generally a first step, and this might be an ongoing process to help think about support in a timely manner.

RESPONDING TO TRAGIC EVENTS

Operational Guidance

This Operational Guidance provides a pathway of tasks to undertake in the event of a Tragic Event which impacts for the school community as a whole - for example the death of a staff member. The nature of the Tragic Event will determine which tasks within the Guidance should be undertaken. If in doubt about which tasks to undertake advice should be sought from your liaison Educational Psychologist or Primary Mental Health Worker.

A more common experience for a school is that of a child experiencing the loss of a parent/carer - in this situation many stages of the pathway will probably not be appropriate, but the needs of that individual child should still be given careful consideration. If a child has been bereaved it is important to involve them in decisions about how the school manages issues relating to their loss. If appropriate, talk to the child about their preferred way of doing things. The liaison EP and PMHW are available for consultation and advice in these situations as required.

Children, young people and their parents/carers have different ways of responding to death and no-one size of support will fit all. Those dealing with bereavement need to be given choices about how information is managed and how they are supported.

Schools can use the suggestions in this guidance to help structure conversations with pupils and families about how they would like to be supported. The conversation will need revisiting over time: children's needs will vary as family life changes and as their development influences their understanding of death and what it means to them. Some key topics to consider in supporting pupils and their parents/ carers include:

- What the child has been told and what they understand
- How to tell the rest of the class and other staff about what has happened
- How the child will return to school
- How the child will be supported in school if they get overwhelmed or upset – who they can talk to, where they can go
- How to balance flexibility and structure e.g. homework, contributing in class
- Key dates that the school should be aware of (e.g. birthday of person who has died, anniversary of death)
- Ways of keeping in touch with the family
- How the Child's needs and wishes will be reviewed over time

Operational Guidance

TASK	Timescale	Responsibility
Immediate		
<p>1. Obtain factual information at start of a Tragic Event. <i>Carefully check accuracy of information and source. (For further information see also Task 1 below)</i></p> <p>In the event of a death <i>contact with the deceased's family (or a friend of the family who will liaise on their behalf) should be established by a member of the SMT (often the Headteacher/Head of Establishment) and the family's wishes respected in communicating with others. There must be clarification about what facts the family are consenting to be shared. Factual information is essential to avoid rumour and confusion.</i></p> <p>If it is a death by suicide seek immediate advice and support from both your liaison EP and PMHW</p>	Immediate	
2. Contact Area Office/ Education managers	Immediate	
3. If dealing with death of child/young person please refer to Communicating Death of Child/Young Person - Appendix C before progressing.	Immediate	
<p>4. SMT gather for an up to date briefing <i>Schools should establish a Tragic Event Management team of a size and composition appropriate to the Establishment and the Event. Consideration should be given in advance of a Tragic Event to identify the composition of this team, their respective roles e.g. who will be</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>the staff contact in the school</i> ○ <i>provide staff with scripts of how to respond to other pupils' questions</i> ○ <i>key person who will be responsible for co-ordinating action and communication within the establishment.</i> <p><i>Put Guidance into action which may include contacting parents and carers of children directly involved, including siblings who attend other schools.</i></p>	Within hours	
<p>5. Call a staff meeting which could include those involved in working in the school community, to give information. <i>Brief staff on dealing with the media – this should only be through the Headteacher or nominee in consultation with press office (be aware of the personal circumstances of staff). In consideration of the impact of information spread by social media all staff should follow guidelines of behaviour as outlined in Highland Council Policies on Social Media and ICT. Teaching staff should also follow GTC guidance on the use of ICT and social media</i></p> <p><i>When staff are informed of the event, they should also be informed of the family's wishes about communication at the earliest possible opportunity so that they are prepared to respond appropriately to children and are prepared</i></p>	Same day	

<i>to share information in age-appropriate ways.</i>		
6. Dealing with enquiries - Those manning the phones are given a prepared, factual statement /script.	Ongoing	
7. Establish a wider support team – clearly identify roles within the wider support team This can include negotiated roles with school's liaison EP, PMHW, Practice Lead, school nurse, Child Protection advisor and other support services as necessary.	Within hours	
<p>8. Inform pupils in small groups/classes/assembly as appropriate Adults who have been identified as part of school's support team, Headteacher or nominee deliver the factual information simply and clearly (with consideration given to the personal circumstances of members of staff). (See also Task 8 below for further information.)</p> <p><i>Consider the best approach for the class or groups of pupils directly affected by the bereavement/ serious incident. It may be that alternative activities are arranged for this group of pupils.</i></p> <p><i>If it is a death within the community and if surviving parents/family wish for pupils to be informed, then staff should consider how best to do this. Bringing the whole school together can be overwhelming for pupils and staff so information given to individual classes or groups may be more appropriate.</i></p> <p><i>Staff should respond to children and young people's questions in an age-appropriate way and in line with the family's wishes. A shared script should be created for staff supporting the incident in terms of what can be appropriately shared in response to children and young people's questions and concerns.</i></p> <p><i>In some instances, it is helpful for two members of staff to be with groups or classes of pupils. Make pupils aware that some time will be spent discussing the incident. Let pupils know about safe spaces within the school they can access if they wish to leave the room at any point during the discussion.</i></p>	Same day	
9. Arrange and inform pupils of a safe place for pupils involved – to talk as they need with appropriate staff available Anticipate and plan for distress. As appropriate agree arrangements for young people to be out of class, where they can go, how they will be supervised, at what point they should return to class. Consider support for staff as well as young people. Are additional staff needed to help to support? Aim is always to acknowledge grief but to normalise situation as soon as possible.	Same day	
<p>10. Inform families (as appropriate) How will parents in the school community be informed? A short, simple letter sent home can help to avoid confusion or disbelief and will support communication as young people return home at the end of the day. (See sample letters in Appendix D) If there has been a death that has impacted upon the school community this should be after consultation with the deceased's family. Ensure a translator is available as required and that letters are available in all relevant languages as soon as possible. (See also Task 10 below for further information.)</p> <p><i>In the Nursery/Primary setting, the letter should be in a sealed envelope and should explain either that:</i></p> <p><i>a) the children have not been informed as it was felt that the parents/family</i></p>	Same day	

would wish to do this; or, b) the children have been informed already by staff.		
11. Arrange a support meeting for staff involved in Tragic Event <i>This could be with school EP or member of the wider support team as required.</i>	ASAP	
Next Few Days		
12. Consider a whole school assembly as appropriate <i>Consider support for this e.g. Church representative. Be aware of cultural diversity (Appendix E provides information about Religions and Beliefs about Death)</i>	Next day	
13 (a) Staff continue to be aware and sensitive to the needs of the pupils (including monitoring behaviour changes), listening as needed. Ensuring support by listening, answering questions in an appropriate manner with pupils knowing how to access support if required.	Next few days	
14 (a) Be aware of high-risk pupils and staff e.g wider family network at a different school, children and/or adults undergoing own personal trauma	Next few days	
15 (a) In the event of a bereavement - school representative clarify in consultation with the bereaved family, arrangements for funeral attendance. <i>(b) A plan should be in place for how siblings or family members are supported (if appropriate) when they return to school</i> <i>(c) Consider if and how to celebrate the deceased person's life, whilst being sensitive to the family's wishes. In the short-term a book of remembrance and a letter box for letters and drawings could be put in place for pupils and staff to share memories with the family of the deceased.</i>	First week or so	
16. Monitor affected pupil(s) regarding a return to school and support required <i>A plan should be in place for how siblings or family members are supported (if appropriate) when they return to school.</i>	First week or so	
Long Term		
17. Staff continue to be aware and sensitive to the needs of the pupils, listening as needed	Ongoing	
18. Continue to monitor high risk pupils and staff	Ongoing	
19. Identify need for group or individual intervention e.g. Seasons for Growth, refer to CHAMs, Crocus <i>Consult with extended support services as appropriate. If agreed in discussion between SMT and EP/CSW/ PMHW about their involvement e.g. meeting staff and/or pupils individually then schedule for meetings agreed jointly.</i>	Weeks/months	
20. For any pupils (particularly siblings or close friends) and/ or staff who have been significantly affected -continue to monitor their well-being, - be aware of the impact of key periods of time e.g anniversary of event, special dates – ensure that they are supported at these times	Ongoing	

Operational Guidance - Further Details on Tasks

Task 1 - For task 1 it is very important to obtain factual information at the start of a major incident News of tragic events can occur in a number of ways e.g. death – a Head teacher may find out directly from a parent, rumours may be circulating for a few hours e.g. verbal, social

media, or there may be an official announcement from a credible source. For a while, those people managing the situation may have to tolerate an incomplete picture of events – the school's action and planning should be based upon the established facts.

Task 8 – Further advice for informing pupils in small groups

The following guidelines may help in informing children of a death or serious illness or accident:

1. Identify those children who had a close relationship with the hurt, ill or dead person so they can be told together as a separate group.
2. Provide a brief context, and then give the news in simple terms. For example:
I've got some really sad news to tell you today that might upset you. There is an illness called cancer. Sometimes people with cancer get better, but other times people die from it. John has been ill with cancer for a long time. I have to tell you John died yesterday.
Or
Sometimes people have accidents at work, at home, at school or on the road. People may be hurt or injured in the accident and they may have to go to hospital for treatment. I have some bad news to tell you that might upset you. Yesterday Stephanie was in an accident and she was very badly injured.
3. Answer questions factually, avoiding using euphemisms like “passed away”, or “lost”. Use the words “dead”, “died” and “death” in context. In subsequent discussion refer to the name naturally – for example, *John died from cancer* or *yes, we're all going to miss Satvinder*.
4. Be prepared for children to say or do the unexpected. Experience has shown some responses or apparent lack of response may be upsetting for adults. No apparent response does not mean that a child does not care.

Task 10 – Further information for informing families and wider communities

Inevitably, bad news of tragic events can travel quickly around the school community, often distorted along the way. If possible, the management of the school should quickly provide a brief written statement, establishing the known facts. For example, in one school, after a pupil died from an illness, rumours circulated that the illness may be contagious. The Headteacher knew that it was not, and that afternoon included this information in a more general letter sent to all parents that informed them of the child's death. In another school, a rumour circulated that the school would be closed the next day – the Headteacher sent a letter assuring parents that the school would be open as normal.

How Schools Can Help After a Tragic Event

It is considered best practice for support to be provided by those closest to the child or young person. However, there are occasions where staff might also be feeling overwhelmed by an event and are not in the best position to be able to provide the support required – in this case another member of school staff should provide the support.

Schools should seek advice and support from Highland Council Education management on matters such as dealing with the press or engaging relevant agencies (such as Police or Children's Services) to act together with the school.

Classroom Management

Maintain normal classroom routine or re-establish it as soon as possible. If teachers themselves find this difficult ensure buddy support or team teaching is available.

Although pupils may benefit from opportunities to discuss what has happened and express their feelings about this, there is some security in knowing that their school life is continuing as usual under the guidance of responsible adults.

Some adjustment to the curriculum may be helpful. It may not be a good time to introduce new material. 'Busy work' may be particularly helpful to pupils – a temporary avoidance of more reflective tasks and a focus on more active ones. Also, encourage resumption of extra curricular activities – for example, after school clubs or team sports.

Classroom Support

Consider providing opportunities for children to explore their feelings e.g. talk, play. If possible, the class teacher, class staff should take an active role in these sessions. There could be one or more sessions, possibly structured around this four-stage process:

1. Providing facts about the incident in line with family wishes and being mindful of siblings who are members of the schools

This is the most important task of the process. It involves providing the children with the facts as far as they are known and dispelling rumours. Rumours often proliferate following a tragic event, and establishing an accurate picture is a key step for children in coming to terms with what has happened.

2. Sharing stories

Children are encouraged to give their accounts of the event, or how they heard about it. This will encourage the development of a shared understanding, and the facilitator can make links between accounts. For younger children it may be more helpful to encourage non-verbal expression – for example, through play and/or art activities.

The teacher should also encourage the sharing of the children's feelings and reactions since the event. Here the role is to explain that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances, that these will pass, but more help will be available if any pupil feels they cannot cope.

3. Empowerment

We need to help the children regain a sense of control. In some situations, it may be appropriate to generate strategies for prevention of a reoccurrence of the event. Pupils can also be helped to identify strategies that will help manage serious incident symptoms – for example, the importance of adequate sleep, eating and exercise.

4. Focus on the future

This part of the process attempts to mark an ending of the event and a turning to the future. Where an incident has involved death, planning memorials or writing letters of condolence can help in this process. Depending upon family wishes (and age, stage of pupils) it may be appropriate to discuss funeral arrangements, and whether the pupils should attend. Alternatively, for people who have been physically injured, writing 'Get Well' cards would also fit naturally. If a fellow pupil will be returning to school after some major event, the other pupils may want to think about how they will encourage that return and support the pupil through an uncomfortable period.

At this point, re-iterate the message about the normality of the children's reactions to the event and the fact that more help will be available if needed.



RESPONDING TO TRAGIC EVENTS

BEREAVEMENT

SUPPORTING CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE

What Grieving Is...

There is no formula for grieving. People vary in their response to loss. Similarly, there are no prescribed time scales for grief, although most achieve some degree of resolution and adjustment eventually.

When someone close to us dies we experience grief and go through a process of mourning. Grief reactions are varied. For more information on grief reactions including Thoughts & Feelings, Emotions, Physical and Behavioural Reactions - see Appendix F.

The way children grieve is often described as 'puddle-jumping': moving rapidly from great distress to physical activity/ playing for example. This is normal.

Adults can help children and young people through the process of grieving by providing age appropriate, factually accurate explanations, using clear language about death. As a result, fears or confusions are minimised. Children are less likely to create fantasies which may be worse than the reality and may compound the distress. Explanations may need to be repeated as children and young people can take time to assimilate difficult information.

The grieving process will be different for each individual. Whilst there are **no time scales** and no fixed ways in which we should grieve, similarities in the way individuals (both adults and children) respond to bereavements have been identified.

Timescales

As highlighted, there are no set timescales to grieving. It is important to consider the individual variations in how a child or young person may grieve. These will be determined by the context of the loss, the degree of attachment to the deceased person, the young person's previous experiences of loss and death and the support mechanisms around them. In general, the initial stage of disbelief and shock passes quite quickly. However, the more complex stage of adjustment can take a long time - perhaps many years. The second year following the death of a loved one has been identified by some children as more difficult to cope with than the first. Of course, feelings of loss and sadness may be present to some extent for a lifetime. **Suggesting that most people will get over the loss within a certain time (this may be as a result of subtle messages they get from those around them, including from well-meaning professionals) may result in the bereaved feeling they 'are doing it wrong' (grieving) and should be 'getting over it'.** Staff in school should continue to be supportive and to be available for as long as it takes.

Grief Brief

Young People from Crocus clearly shared that it is important to have a supportive adult in school still available to them in the long term. The Young People have developed The Grief Brief which

they would like shared widely to encourage adults to understand how to respond to support children and young people who have been bereaved.

YOUR GRIEF BRIEF

Acknowledge

... what has happened
... don't avoid the facts

Listen

... without judgment
... to the person in front of you
... I know how I feel

Let me take the lead...

... give me choices
... empower me to manage my situation

GIVE ME TIME



... there is no set time limit on grief
... some days will be better than others
... there will be anniversaries, random memories, smells, sounds...

No assumptions

... about how I should be feeling
... every day is different
... some things are nothing to do with the bereavement

know where support can be found (if it is needed)...

... but don't underestimate the difference you make by being there



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The young people from Crocus have given their permission for us to include the Grief Brief in our Guidance. It is helpful if staff who are supporting pupils have a copy of the Grief Brief.

Choices for Pupils

Teenagers from across Scotland have shared their experiences of bereavement for a new comic which aims to help other young people deal with their grief. Information in the comics can help those around the young people and young people themselves understand their grief experiences.

The following provides a link to the comic

https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/40776533/Comics_Bereavement_Final_a.pdf

A group of bereaved pupils working with [Seasons for Growth](#) in Scotland have come up with a list of suggestions for support. Pupils may find some of these approaches helpful and discussing these can help you to open up conversations with them and their family. Remember, their needs will change, and you may need to check that the support you are giving is still appropriate as time moves on. Your support will help, although it may not always appear so.

Has someone important to you died?
Ideas to help your teacher support you

People cope in all sorts of ways when someone dies. Often teachers want to help you in your grief, but aren't sure how. Here are some suggestions from other bereaved young people about ways your teacher could support you. Tick the ones you think would help at the moment, and give it to your teacher to help start the conversation.

- ☐ Please talk to me about how to let the rest of my class and other staff know what has happened
- ☐ Ask me how I am feeling. It may not be obvious.
- ☐ Understand that I will not 'get over it' or 'put it behind me' but with time I will learn to cope with all the changes
- ☐ Help me to find new dreams of the future and make plans
- ☐ Give me a note that lets me leave class briefly without having to explain myself, if I feel overwhelmed
- ☐ Make a plan with me for how I will come back to school
- ☐ Understand that it's hard for me to feel motivated. I may have difficulty meeting deadlines
- ☐ Help me to cope by treating me the same as everyone else
- ☐ Realise that I have a lot to deal with. I will keep up as best I can
- ☐ Let me know about groups for children and young people who are also coping with loss and change
- ☐ Arrange for me to get extra help with my work so I don't get behind
- ☐ Talk to me about what has happened. I may need more information, advice and education about loss
- ☐ Give me extra encouragement for all the things I am managing to do and keep me in mind
- ☐ Please try _____

With thanks to young people and Seasons for Growth trainers at the Notre Dame Centre in Glasgow.
Published by the Childhood Bereavement Network at the National Children's Bureau reg. charity 258825.
For more ideas and local and national support organisations, visit www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Childhood Bereavement Network
NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU
Part of the Family

[Download the card](#)

Your teacher may want to help but not be sure how. Here are some ideas you could tick and share with them.



It is possible to download this [card](#) from Childhood Bereavement Network



Sometimes, people around you want to help but they're not sure how. Here are some suggestions for how your parent or carer can support you. You could tick the ones you think would work, and give it to them

[Download the card](#)



[Download the card](#)

Further Information about Supporting Pupils who have been Bereaved

Some staff may not feel they are the 'best person' to support the child, but if they are trusted by the child, and have a pre-existing relationship, then they may be more useful than a more experienced, but unfamiliar, adult.

However, if the member of staff, for whatever reason, would rather not attempt to engage the child, then the management team in the school must be sensitive to this and offer someone else.

Generally, pupils may lack concentration, experience tiredness in school or show more immature behaviours (for example, sucking thumb or physical clinging). Teachers will need patience in managing withdrawn behaviour, irritability or increased nervousness and anxiety. This may happen immediately or after some time. It would therefore be important to alert appropriate staff particularly at times of transition.

There is a developmental aspect to children and young people's experiences of grief and sorrow. The pre-school or nursery child will experience a sense of loss but may not understand the permanence of the loss. During the primary school stage, children will develop an understanding of this permanence, and this may go along with feelings of guilt and responsibility for the death. In adolescence, powerful emotions of grief are likely to be experienced which may lead to the young person questioning the meaning of life. (See www.childbereavementuk.org for further information.)

When supporting pupils, show that you are concerned and willing to discuss the bereavement. Make opportunities for the child to have a private discussion – for example, through staying behind to help with a task. However, if the child does not want to talk, respect their right to privacy. The child may not want to express their feeling at all; or may prefer to use creative activities to express their feelings e.g. painting, role-play.

If a pupil does not want to talk

- If a child does not want to talk that is ok but it is helpful for a few or at least one trusted key adult to let the pupil know they are aware of what has happened and that they are available to the child even if the pupil just wants to sit there quietly alongside the adult and say nothing. It is important to let your genuine concern and caring show. It can be very difficult for a bereaved pupil to develop an enduring connection with the person who died if this person is never mentioned or acknowledged.
- A simple acknowledgement can be important for a bereaved pupil, "What sort of things did your Dad like?"
- Check in with a pupil regularly. Your questions may make them feel upset or angry and they may not wish to talk to you at that time, but they will know that you are someone who is there for them.

Many bereaved children are left lost for words by death, others simply haven't enough words to express themselves. This resource from Childhood Bereavement Network shares supportive words and emojis from children who know how it feels -

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/media/97729/Lost-For-Words-Benjamin-Brooks-Dutton.pdf>

If the pupil does want to talk:

- listening is important – listen carefully. Set time aside, be available.
- listen with warmth, full attention, empathy and be respectful
- avoid emphasis on advice or interpretation
- try not to interrupt - allow silences, a pause may mean that the child may want to re-order their thoughts before continuing
- active listening skills will be helpful, such as simple acknowledgement of what has been said, reflecting back what the child has said, naming the emotions you hear, and summarising briefly what has been said
- answer questions as accurately and honestly as you can. Although sometimes difficult, it is better to answer awkward questions truthfully. It is fine to say 'I don't know' if you can't answer the question
- try to give the message that the feelings of bereavement are natural and normal
- do not be afraid to use the words dead or death "I was very sorry to hear of the death of your..."
- even when a child wants to speak don't pressure them to keep speaking about how they feel – they often can't verbalise this – be led by the child/ young person.
- give them plenty of space. They may for example be crying one moment and laughing the next.
- In the longer term continue to give them opportunities to talk when they want to.
- allow the child to cry if (s)he feels upset; providing comfort but space to connect with the emotion and pain, assure them that it is safe to express their emotions
- it is ok for you (the adult) to cry and show your feelings – it is important to be authentic. In doing so children will know that it is all right to grieve. Loss is painful and there are no shortcuts to getting through the pain. However, if you (the adult) feels overwhelmed by your feelings (this is a normal reaction at times) then to keep the pupil safe it is appropriate to request that another member of staff provide the support.

Things to avoid

- platitudes, "Don't get upset, it'll be alright"
- relating your own losses, "Yes I remember when my mother died, I felt ..."
- overcompensating, "No, don't ask her to do that, she's been through such a lot, the poor child"
- changing the subject, "Try not to think about it, now how about if you got on with ..."
- minimising the loss, "Yes, I know your hamster died but it is not the end of the world"
- telling the child what they should feel, "I know you're upset now but you'll soon feel better"
- euphemisms are generally used when people find it difficult to talk about something. Euphemisms about death and dying should be avoided when talking with bereaved children and young people. Sometimes adults, feel it is kinder to use a euphemism, especially when talking with very young children. Examples of euphemisms about death might include; 'gone to sleep', 'gone away', 'been taken', 'passed away' 'gone to the angels'. Euphemisms can lead to misunderstandings and confusion as children do not appreciate the meaning implied in the euphemism. This is especially the case for children

and young people who are literal thinkers (e.g. those on the Autism Spectrum) or at a concrete stage in their cognitive development. The use of euphemisms can lead to anxiety which can complicate the grieving process and may encourage young people to build up fantasies and myths around death (Lost for Words, 2005.)

Normalisation

Normalising the reactions that many individuals experience after a bereavement can reduce feelings of alienation and assist with processing the event and losses. These feelings and reactions are distressing but are normal reactions to the situation. Although they are common, different people experience them in different ways, based on their circumstances and experiences.

It will be important for a teacher supporting a pupil to be aware of the family's cultural or religious influences, particularly beliefs and attitudes to death. For example, some cultures resist talking about death openly, whereas others have formal procedures relating to loss and bereavement. (Please see Appendix D for some cultural and religious information, more information about different cultural beliefs about death can be found in the Schools' Information Pack (Fact sheet 11), The Child Bereavement Trust www.childbereavementtrust.org.uk)

The pupil's friends may benefit from a discussion to help them explore the best ways of being supportive.

Ensure that other members of staff are aware of what has happened, so that the pupil is not unnecessarily hurt by a chance remark.

Long term, remembering special days (such as a birthday or the anniversary of the death) may be helpful. It may be a particularly difficult day, but teachers can acknowledge the loss, whilst at the same time helping pupils to realise how far they have come. www.winstonswish.org.uk offers helpful suggestions.

Supporting a Bereaved Pupil Returning to School

- For a bereaved child or young person, returning to the school or setting environment can be a difficult transition. Once the child is in the school or setting however, it may provide some respite for/from other family members, who are also going through the grieving process. If handled appropriately, the return to school can give the child or young person some security and stability. The routines are important as it brings some normality back into the child's life. However, some children can become quite anxious after a significant loss and revert to the behaviour of a younger child.
- If possible, discussion should take place with the family before the child returns to the school or other setting. The child's worries and anxieties need to be addressed. Subject to the permission of child and parent(s) the class or peers should be informed. You may wish to consider telling other parents of the loss, as their children may also wish to discuss this and how they should respond.

- Some systems of support which can be explored with the young person include - Time out cards, access to a quiet space for time out and reflection if required, more intensive access/ support from guidance staff/identified key member of staff as required. Access to further support in time if required e.g. Crocus
- Regular contact needs to be maintained with the bereaved family to communicate how the child is coping at school or in the setting. Adjustment to bereavement can sometimes be a long and painful process. You may see changes in behaviour, e.g. reluctance to attend, poor concentration, becoming withdrawn and tearful. These changes could occur over a period of time. Significant dates may be important to note and possibly mark e.g. Mother's Day, Father's Day, the anniversary of the loss, the birthday of the deceased.
- It is important to let your genuine concern and caring show. Children need permission to talk about the loss as much and as often as they want to. They should be allowed to express their unhappy feelings too when they are willing to share them.
- The bereaved child's friends may also need to talk. They may be feeling uncomfortable and uncertain about their attempts to make contact. Being avoided by friends can add to existing pain.
- As Time Passes:
 - be prepared to listen, again and again and again.
 - continue to give bereaved pupils time.
 - it may be many months before they can fully cope with the pressures of schoolwork. Remember that they will be grieving for life and the loss will always be with them.
 - although for the majority of children and young people the empathic understanding in the familiar and secure surroundings of school may be all the bereavement support some children - or staff - require, though referral to more specialist support should be a consideration where the impact of grief is more complex.

Bereaved Siblings

Grief elicits a range of emotions and behaviours and everyone grieves in their own way. Siblings will demonstrate their individual responses to the death as each will have had their own unique relationship with the person who died. Their grief will also reflect their understanding (particularly if they are at different developmental stages) and their individual personalities.

Children's Understanding of Death

Having an awareness of how a child or young person might understand death or dying can make it easier for an adult to help or support a bereaved child. A child's questions and observations about death and dying will reflect the level of their understanding. It is thought that a conceptual understanding of death follows the same developmental sequence in most children even if this occurs at different rates or stages in their maturity (Dyregrov, 2002).

The research evidence suggests that children have some understanding of death from an early age. Understanding does of course vary with age, experience, developmental or cognitive level, personality and family circumstances. Children's experience of bereavement is as painful as adults, but there may be differences in how they respond. Adults grieve intensely and consistently, whereas children and young people can be distracted from their grief. They tend to experience periods of intense emotion alongside their more usual moods (puddle-jumping). This does not, however, mean that children's grieving is superficial.

What are they feeling? (From Winston's Wish Schools' Information pack [www.winston's wish](http://www.winston'swish.com))

Children aged 2 to 5

Children aged between 2 to 5 years think that death is reversible and that people who have died can come back. Their thoughts are characterised by what we call "magical thinking". Children can be convinced that it was something they said or did or thought that caused the person to die. The flip side of this thinking is that they can believe their words, actions or thoughts can bring the dead person back. They need to be reassured repeatedly that the death was not their fault. Children's thinking in this age range is also concrete – they cannot grasp abstract concepts or roundabout ways of saying things. Instead use specific concrete words such as "Mummy has died" and give specific explanations about why the person died. Don't be afraid to be honest and tell your child if you don't have an answer.

It is not unusual for children of this age to revert to behaviour patterns they had when they were younger such as bed-wetting, use of a security blanket or thumb sucking. Try to be tolerant. In time, these earlier behaviour patterns will probably disappear again, once family life resumes.

One of the most difficult aspects of a child's grief at these ages is how they ask the same questions over and over again in an effort to begin making sense of their loss. Children are naturally curious, and they want to make sense of what is happening in their world. Their repeated questions are not a sign that your explanations aren't good enough - it is just the way they do things at this age. Reading books on death and loss, playing, drawing and giving them opportunities to identify and talk about worries and feelings will all help them deal with the loss. When they experience a death in this age range they are at their most helpless and are most dependent on adults to regain their balance.

Children aged 6 to 9

In this age range the child begins to develop an understanding of death as irreversible and something that will happen to all living things but they may be confused about it. It is not uncommon for children to think of death as something spooky, like a zombie or a spirit that comes to get you. It is important that their specific worries are spoken about, that they share bad dreams and are told that what they're feeling is normal. Children are reassured by having their worrying and negative thoughts talked through, giving them skills and confidence to be in charge of them.

Children may display what you feel is an unhealthy curiosity with issues such as what a dead body looks like and what happens to a body after a person has been dead for some time. This curiosity is natural, and they will benefit from clear explanations. They may worry about how

the person who has died will eat, breath and keep warm. It is important to give them information and tell them that once someone has died, the body doesn't feel any more and they don't get hungry.

Children at this stage may complain of a sore tummy, headaches or just generally not feeling well. These are what we call 'somatic' complaints, where unexpressed feelings and emotions can lead to physical symptoms or discomfort. Somatic complaints are normal, but it is important that routines are maintained while gently acknowledging when someone important dies.

Children this age may have difficulty expressing feelings verbally and may retreat into themselves. In dealing with their feelings of helplessness, you may notice increased aggression. It is important to avoid clichés such as "You're such a brave boy/girl". Children will interpret this that you want or need them not to share their feelings. They need you and other important people in their lives to show them that it's OK to express their feelings.

Children aged 9 to 13

In this age range children are much more aware of the finality of death and the impact the death has on them. They are able to understand death as both concrete and abstract.

Children may experience difficulties in their interactions with their peers. The death of someone important can make them feel different at the very time they want to be the same as everyone else.

It is important to find ways to build their self-esteem. Children at this age are beginning to think of the longer-term consequences of the loss of the relationship. They are aware of the loss they feel in the present but also of the losses they will experience in the coming months and years when they encounter certain important milestones or occasions and realise that they won't be able to share these with the person who has died.

At this age children are beginning to move away from dependence on the family and they start to form important relationships with other children. The death of someone important can easily destabilise them, leaving them feeling unsafe and more dependent on the family. Their ability to manage their feelings may be disrupted and lead to mood swings or more definite ups and downs in their feelings. Big emotional releases (such as anger or distress) are not uncommon but can be scary for children at this stage. They will benefit from your willingness to listen and your assurances that the feelings are normal.

Adolescents

Friends and peers are increasingly important as young people develop their ideas of who they are and what is important to them. They want to be accepted by other important people in their lives. Their bodies are changing; they are aware of all sorts of possibilities for themselves and are more aware of the future - their future. It is quite common for risk-taking behavior to increase during adolescence as young people test the boundaries.

They may struggle to make longer term plans as the death of someone important causes them to reflect on "the meaning of life" and ponder on the question "what's the point?" Or you may find that they are so busy with different activities they don't stop to reflect. This can be an effective way of keeping intense feelings under wraps if they are worried about losing control of

their emotions.

If you notice a teenager who is withdrawing, acting very matter of fact and detached, or angry and protesting, then remain available for them - but don't push. Your job is to remind them that you're there and if they'd prefer to speak to someone else, you'll help them find peers or other trusted adults to support them. Although an adolescent's growing process is most like an adult's they are still going through important emotional development at this age and are not ready to manage adult responsibilities even if at times they think they are adult. They need to be reassured of your love and support and to know that the limits you set are still enforced.

Grieving Children and Young People

When a child or young person experiences the death of someone important to them, they need not only to adapt to living with their grief within the family home, but also to the challenges of a changed life in the outside world. This will include school. Children spend a large proportion of their time at nursery or school and their social life is often centred on friends made there. Grieving children and young people highlight how school responds is very important to them

What school can offer a grieving child just by carrying on with normal daily routine

In order to protect immediate family from further upset children/young people sometimes find it easier to talk to someone not directly involved such as a familiar trusted teacher. Going to school can give a sense of normality and many choose to return immediately after a death has occurred for this reason. Others need to take a few days off, but the longer they are away the harder it is to return. When grieving, children of any age often view school as a place where they can have some time away from overwhelming emotions and sadness.

With parent permission it helps that staff know that a child is grieving, who they are grieving for and when the death occurred. Some children are reluctant for this information to be given out but if everyone has the basic facts this prevents insensitive remarks being made by teachers and others because they are unaware of what has happened. Certain lesson topics may bring back painful reminders of the circumstances surrounding the day. This unintended upset can cause real distress for a child and the member of staff concerned.

How a school can help

Below are examples of what school can do to help a grieving child:

- To meet and talk to the child about how they would like their return to school managed and how best to break the news to the friends and classmates.
- To acknowledge what has happened but without making a fuss so that the child does not feel the spotlight is on them.
- Someone of the child's choice that they can talk to should they feel the need to do this.
- A member of staff who will keep a lookout for the child at school who will be the person to contact if a parent/carer has any queries or concerns.
- A 'time- out' system to enable the child to have some space away from the hustle and bustle if they feel overwhelmed by powerful emotions. Some schools can organise this as

time away from class but still with an adult, others have a quiet corner in the classroom.

- A record of key dates such as the anniversary of the death which can often act as a trigger for children to revisit their grief.
- Some flexibility around deadlines for handing in work grieving is exhausting and a child or young person may struggle to concentrate on schoolwork.

(Adapted from leaflet by Child Bereavement UK - Grieving Children and Young People: the role of school)

RESPONDING TO TRAGIC EVENTS

Bereavement by Suicide

If dealing with a bereavement by Suicide school staff should contact their liaison EP or PMHW for advice.

Samaritans has a service called Step By Step, which can provide support to schools after a suicide through telephone contact in the Inverness area. Several child bereavement services (both national and local) can guide parents on supporting children bereaved by suicide. Some of these have particular programmes of support, such as groups, for children and young people who have been bereaved by suicide.

Bereavement by Suicide

The death of someone important can cause great pain and sadness whatever the cause of death; however, families bereaved through suicide also have to face additional pressures and pain. Suicide leads to the involvement of many strangers e.g. police officers, press, procurator fiscal and a family's private grief can become very public.

The extent of the shock of suicide is often underestimated. The loss of what might have been is even more powerful when a death is by suicide because of the decision to die.

Bereavement by suicide shares characteristics with other bereavements and it is also different. Understanding how and why it differs is helpful when you are supporting children / young people who have been bereaved in this way.

The grieving process is often complicated and typically lasts longer than other types of bereavement – significantly effects may still be felt for many years after the death. Although there is no single or correct way to experience any bereavement there are many common reactions and factors in bereavements by suicide including:

- Circumstances of the loss
- Emotional and physical reactions
- Post-traumatic stress
- The survivor's questions – "why?" and "what could I have done?"
- Stigma and isolation
- Family and community tensions
- Other prejudices

- Lack of privacy
- Investigations
- Practical concerns

Circumstances of the Loss

A death by suicide is usually sudden, often unexpected and may be violent. These factors increase the degree of shock and trauma experienced compared to many other types of bereavement. Survivors may struggle to make sense of what has happened, and fundamental beliefs may be challenged.

Emotional and Physical Reactions

Bereavement by suicide can bring an intensity and a range of emotions and physical reactions which may be unfamiliar, frightening and uncontrollable.

Emotional reactions are often complex, and people may find that they are experiencing a bewildering range of feelings including guilt, anger, shame, rejection, sadness and fear. People who have been bereaved by suicide may become vulnerable to thoughts of suicide themselves.

Physical reactions may include tightness in various body parts, stomach pains, sleeplessness and poor concentration.

Post-Traumatic Stress

Those who have been bereaved by suicide may have symptoms of post-traumatic stress. If the person witnessed the death or found the body, they may suffer from flashbacks or nightmares. This can also happen even if the person did not see the body but cannot stop imagining what happened – and imagination may be worse than the reality.

Survivor's Questions

Most people bereaved by suicide are haunted by two questions - "why did the person take their life?" and "could I have somehow prevented it?". These are impossible questions to answer and eventually the person may have to either have to accept that they will never know or settle on an answer which they can live with.

It is natural that the bereaved person will take some considerable time in exploring these questions and it is an important part of the grieving process. However, it can also be damaging if they are unable to reach a stage where the questions occupy less of their thoughts or if they cannot find an answer they can accept. Self-esteem, confidence and hope can be severely compromised.

Stigma and Isolation

Death by suicide, even more than other types of bereavement, makes many people uncomfortable and unsure how to react. There is still a stigma attached to suicide, rooted in centuries of history and this generates misplaced associations of weakness, blame,

shame or even sin or crime. This stigma can prevent people from seeking help when they need it and others from offering support when they want to.

There may be a desire to deny that the death was a suicide – this may be driven by cultural values or from a sense of denial or of shame. This can create further confusion in an already complex situation.

Many people who have been bereaved by suicide find that they feel isolated. Others may avoid them, perhaps not knowing what to say or because they don't want to upset the person. The sense of isolation may be especially acute if the bereaved person perceives other people to be uncaring or judgemental. Some people are unlucky enough to receive particularly thoughtless and malicious comments.

It may also be that the bereaved person avoids contact themselves – they may struggle to share their own feelings because they are fearful themselves of what they are experiencing, they don't want to upset other people or they may worry about how to answer questions such as “how did he die?”

Family and Community Tensions

Whilst family and friends are often a great source of support, they can also be a source of tension and conflict. Sometimes families struggle to communicate, protective instincts kick in and they may be worried about causing more pain or about having a different view or feeling to others. Because the range of feelings and emotions experienced after a suicide can be so unfamiliar and frightening, people may be uncomfortable or scared to share.

Existing tensions and difficulties in family relationships can be surfaced as a result of the shock of trauma. Some people cope with their pain by blaming another person for the death – this may go as far as excluding them from the rest of the family, denying them the opportunity to attend the funeral and withholding information about the investigation. This can lead to huge rifts and a deep sense of hurt and isolation being added to the loss.

Lack of Privacy

When someone dies by suicide, it can be difficult to maintain privacy. There may be emergency services at the scene and visits from police. There may be media attention – this can happen when the person dies and may be repeated after the investigation by the coroner or procurator fiscal. The inquest is held in a public court of law and anyone can attend – in certain circumstances reports will be made which remain on publicly accessible databases.

Investigations

The investigation by the coroner or procurator fiscal is a source of considerable concern for those bereaved by suicide. The process can be lengthy, the proceedings are unfamiliar, and the language is legal and technical. The process is open to public attention and there is often media reporting. There may also be additional investigations e.g. if the death happened whilst the individual was under the care of another agency e.g. in prison or if they were receiving mental health treatment.

In addition to being an added strain, investigations may reveal information about the bereaved person which was unknown to their family and friends.

Practical Concerns

In addition to this, there are other practical concerns such as finances, funerals, returning home and returning to work which the bereaved will need to face.

(Adapted from SOBS, Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide - How suicide bereavement is different)

<http://uk-sobs.org.uk/for-professionals/how-suicide-bereavement-is-different/>

Death of a Parent by Suicide

For children of any age, the death of a parent by suicide brings particular challenges. They are likely to feel abandoned and it can be very hard for children to avoid feeling that somehow, they weren't enough of a reason for their parent to keep living.

Talking to children about how the person died will depend on the child's age or level of understanding. If there are young children who have lost a parent or sibling to suicide, a natural response is to want to protect them from knowing what has happened, and to think up an alternative explanation for the death. However, because of the likelihood of overheard conversations, media coverage, gossip and visits from the police, it is hard to keep the cause of death a secret. It is better for children to hear the truth from people who love them than from someone in the playground or on social media: this is a time when they need to feel there are people they can trust. Talking about what has happened is a chance to answer any questions (within the limits of their age and level of understanding) and to check that they have understood what has been said. It is also a chance to reassure them they were not to blame. Ideally, a parent would be the best person to tell the child what has happened – if this is not possible, ask someone they trust to explain what has happened.

If the child has already been given a different explanation for the death, it is possible to go back and change it. For example, by saying something like: 'You know I told you that your dad had an accident and that is why he died. Well, I've been thinking about this and I would like to tell you a little more about how he died. I didn't know what to say when it happened, it was such a shock. Now I'd like you to know what actually happened that day.'

Children and young people will have the same range and intensity of feelings as adults but may need help identifying and expressing their emotions. It may be the first time that someone they know has died and even the concept of death is new to them. Understanding suicide can be overwhelmingly difficult and confusing. They may find it very hard to cry: it doesn't mean they aren't as distressed as someone who can't stop crying. The way children grieve is often described as 'puddle-jumping': moving rapidly

from great distress to physical activity, for example. This is normal. Some emotions can be strongly felt by children and young people depending on their age and level of understanding. It is common for a child who has been bereaved by suicide to feel that they were in some way to blame – for something they did or did not do; or something they said or did not say. Giving regular reassurance is important.

Young people may become extremely angry – with the person who died, with other members of the family, with themselves. Grief can put a great strain on relationships and young people may fall out with members of the family or with friends. It is also very natural for a child to be scared that someone else in the family may also die by suicide.

They benefit from reassurance. A parent could say something like: ‘I know I have been very upset, angry and shaky since your Dad died but I am not going anywhere. I will get upset, because I am still so sad that he died, but it does not mean I will die the way he did.’ It is natural to be afraid that affected children will grow up believing that suicide is an option. Making it clear that talking about what has happened is allowed, and that it is helpful to share how you are feeling is important. It also helps to explore with them alternative ways of coping with difficulties.

Children may also appreciate being helped with how to answer questions from others: their friends may be very direct and inquisitive. Help them find something they are comfortable saying, for example: ‘My sister died at the weekend. It is very sad. It was suicide. Please don’t ask me for any more information. If I feel I can talk about it, sometime, I’ll let you know.’ Some young people may find it easier to talk and may want to say something like: ‘Please don’t avoid talking about your father just because of what happened to mine. It’s tough but I’d rather we talked about it.’ It may be that other young people, in person or through social media, ask intrusive questions; it can help to have a sentence ready such as: ‘Thanks for being interested, but I’m not going to talk about it so please don’t ask me.’

Death of a Sibling by Suicide

If a brother or sister dies, the sibling(s) immediately lose someone whom they have grown up with, laughed with, argued with, and with whom they have shared a lot of memories. A variety of feelings might be felt by the remaining sibling(s). The surviving sibling(s) might feel;

- that they should have protected their brother/sister;
- hurt that their brother/sister did not turn to them for support, especially if the surviving sibling is the eldest;
- if there was a troubled relationship, the siblings may feel as though they are left

with unresolved issues.

Not only do the remaining siblings have their own grief and confusion, but they can feel responsible for helping to support their parents with their grief too. It might feel as if they have lost all their family at once if parents withdraw from them into their grief, and it can be hard not to blame the person who has died.

It can be helpful for the surviving siblings to talk through feelings with wider family and friends to get their support.

Death of a Friend by Suicide

If the person who died was a friend, young people may need intense support; they may have shared things together and they will wonder if there was more they could have done. Their friend may be someone they knew online, and other people may not understand the intensity and importance of that connection. It can help if young people know there are places (such as support organisations, school counsellors, helplines) where they can talk about their feelings, as sometimes they may struggle to share their thoughts with other members of the family.

As a friend of the person who died, a child/young person may sometimes feel that their grief and needs can be overlooked and that it is difficult to get their voice heard or obtain support. It can be hard to find themselves in a secondary role after the death and having little or no involvement in planning the funeral or other arrangements.

A friend may also have particularly intense feelings to deal with if they were the person who knew how low their friend was feeling also the friend who has died maybe knew things about them that no-one else did – and now, no-one does.

Friends can sometimes feel that they are not 'entitled' to any support after someone dies. It is important to remember that what matters is how this loss affects individuals, not whether they were related to the person who died.

(Adapted from Help is at Hand booklet – copies www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk)

RESPONDING TO TRAGIC EVENTS

SERIOUS INCIDENT

Serious Incidents

Most of the guidance to this point has been about children and young people's understanding of death and the impact on them of being bereaved. However, schools also have to deal with unexpected serious incidents e.g. fire, pandemic.

Whenever a serious incident occurs, children, like many people, may be confused or frightened. Most likely they will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. School staff can help children cope first and foremost by establishing a sense of safety and security. As more information becomes available, adults can continue to help children work through their emotions and perhaps even use the process as a learning experience.

What is a serious incident?

The dictionary describes a serious incident as "a time of danger or great difficulty".

How do children react to serious incident?

There is no such thing as a typical reaction. Children react to serious incidents in different ways. Most children show changes in their behaviour. These changes might appear immediately or not until weeks or months later. You might notice changes at home, school, or both.

Reactions are often short lived. How long they last depends on many factors including the nature of the serious incident, the child / young person's age, family circumstances and the support available from family and friends. When changes appear immediately following the serious incident, they are easier to understand. When the reactions appear much later their importance can easily be overlooked or misunderstood because adults do not link the change in behaviour to the serious incident. Instead, adults might come to believe that the child is just being difficult and uncooperative.

What should I look for?

If a child has been through a serious incident the main things to look out for are changes in how they think, feel and behave.

Thoughts and Feelings

It can be difficult to notice changes in children's thoughts and feelings especially if they can't put into words what is troubling them. Following a serious incident, children may begin to think and feel differently about themselves and others. The same is true of adults.

Following a serious incident children may:

- think that they are responsible for the serious incident; that they did something wrong; they may blame themselves.
- feel unsafe and insecure; they may feel guilty, become easily upset by everyday events.
- do not know why they feel the way they do and need help to talk about and understand their feelings.

Behaviour

It is easier to spot changes in children / young people's behaviour. Others may notice changes too e.g. parents, wider staff – so it's worth asking them. Young children often express their fears and worries through their play – so observe their play.

Following a Serious Incident Children / Young People might:

- be afraid of being alone
- become clingy; have problems sleeping; have toileting accidents
- become quiet and withdrawn
- have difficulty concentrating
- have unexplained tantrums

Generally, pupils may lack concentration, experience tiredness in school or show more immature behaviours (for example, sucking thumb or physical clinging). Teachers will need patience in managing withdrawn behaviour, irritability or increased nervousness and anxiety. This may happen immediately or after some time. There is a developmental aspect to how children and young people respond.

Children and young People may respond with grief reactions. (Please refer to the previous section.) Grief reactions occur not only in response to a bereavement but also in response to change or loss.

In any of these circumstances, adults should be vigilant for apparently unexplained changes in behaviour in children or staff who were not necessarily directly involved with the original incident. This is often a sign that the event has acted as a trigger for some unresolved loss or trauma that they have previously suffered and for which they may now be receptive to being helped.

How to Support Children / Young People?

If children are to overcome the effects of a serious incident they need help to regain their sense of emotional safety. Teachers can help them do this by:

- Providing lots of reassurance and comfort
- Maintaining regular routines such as attending nursery or school
- Providing firm limits, these help to maintain a sense of security.
- Correcting any misunderstandings about the serious incident
- Protecting from further fright or unnecessary separations
- Providing opportunities for play
- Monitoring their play at home and in school
- Listening to and accept their fears
- Listen to and accept their strong feelings and vivid memories of the serious incident

When supporting pupils, show that you are concerned and willing to discuss the event. Make opportunities for children to have private discussions if they are seeking this – for example, through staying behind to help with a task. However, if children do not want to talk, respect their right to privacy. Children may not want to express their feelings at all, or they may prefer to use creative expression e.g. painting.

If the child *does* want to talk:

- listen with warmth and full attention
- avoid emphasis on advice or interpretation
- active listening skills will be helpful, such as simple acknowledgement of what has been said, reflecting back what the child has said, naming the emotions you hear, and summarising briefly what has been said
- answer questions as accurately and honestly as you can
- try to give the message that the feelings are natural and normal

Some people may not feel they are the 'best person' to do this kind of thing, but if they are trusted by the child/ children, and have a pre-existing relationship, then they may be more useful than a more experienced, but unfamiliar, adult.

However, if the teacher, for whatever reason, would rather not attempt to engage with the child/ children then the management team in the school must be sensitive to this and offer someone else.

Try not to single out any child for special privileges no matter their level of distress– all children need to feel part of their peer group and should be expected to take part in the normal activities of school and classroom. At the same time, allowances may have to be made in terms of the quantity, quality and type of work expected.

After a serious incident it is not unusual for children to keep things to themselves. Usually, this is because they do not want to upset adults. Sometimes it's because they blame themselves. In time if you are worried about a child and how they are responding to the serious incident you might like to seek advice from your liaison EP or PMHW with parent/carer permission.

Children and Young People - Dealing with a Serious Incident

What school can offer just by carrying on with normal daily routine

At a time of serious incident children/young people sometimes seek to talk to someone outside of the family such as a familiar trusted teacher. Going to school can give a sense of normality. Children of any age often view school as a place where they can have some time away from overwhelming emotions and sadness.

How a school can help

Below are examples of what school can do to help a child/children during a time of serious incident:

- Normal daily routine – which provides predictability and routine.
- To acknowledge what has happened but without making a fuss
- Provide someone that each child/ young person can talk to should they feel the need to do this.

- Staff can keep a lookout for each child at school and there will be a contact if a parent/carer has any queries or concerns.
- A 'time- out' system to enable children to have some space away from the hustle and bustle if they feel overwhelmed by powerful emotions. Some schools can organise this as time away from class but still with an adult, others have a quiet corner in the classroom.

RESPONDING TO TRAGIC EVENTS

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Coping After the Event – What Can Help?

The purpose of this handout is to provide some tips for coping.

Supporting a bereaved pupil/ a pupil dealing with a Tragic Event can be emotionally draining. Be aware that your personal circumstances may impact your ability to support a bereaved pupil. Look after yourself and colleagues by talking and sharing feelings and experiences.

In addition to being mindful of the reactions of children and young people, it is important for staff to take care of their own well-being. Below are some pointers which can help you to cope: -

- Continue with routines. Although it may be hard at times, it can be useful to continue to do things you would normally do. We all do better when we stick to our daily routines (including hobbies and spending time with friends). This can help to remind us that the difficult situation does not have to take control of every aspect of our lives.
- Try to avoid making major decisions or life changes just now which could bring additional stress for you and your family.
- It is more important than ever that you take care of your physical health. If you can, try to eat regularly and avoid long breaks between mealtimes. Remain hydrated and be careful about the amount of alcohol and drugs you take. Exercise and relaxation can provide longer lasting feelings of well-being which can help you cope.
- Try to put some time aside for you. It is important for you and your family that you give yourself permission to look after yourself
- Remember to take time for yourself; do something you enjoy, have a treat, do some exercise

Everyone who is in any way involved with an event may experience emotional reactions. These might happen if you:

- Were a witness or were involved in the event.
- Arrived upon the scene of the event.
- Had a “near miss” or were almost involved in the event.
- Knew or know others who were killed, harmed, or involved in some way.
- Have a relationship with family or friends of victims.
- Have heard a lot about the event through media or friends.
- Are reminded of other incidents in your life by this event.

It is important to remember that the reactions listed below are normal reactions to an unexpected event. It is difficult to predict what type of reactions you will experience following a Tragic Event. It is important to allow yourself permission to have your reactions and take care of them both by yourself and by asking for help from others, as best you can. Many people find it helpful to have information about what constitutes a typical reaction to a Tragic Event.

Typical Reactions

Not everyone experiences the same set of responses, but people typically experience reactions that fall into four basic categories. Here are some reactions that you may be experiencing.

Psychological and Emotional

- Heightened anxiety or fear.
- Irritability and restlessness.
- Feelings of sadness, moodiness, more crying than usual.
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness.
- Feelings of numbness or detachment.
- “Survivor guilt” or feelings of self-blame that you escaped the tragedy.
- Re-experiencing of the event, possibly including intrusive thoughts or images of the event.
- Distressing dreams or nightmares.
- Flashbacks about the event.
- Distress when exposed to events that remind you of the trauma.
- Feelings of estrangement or isolation from others.
- Hyper vigilance (feelings especially attuned to events around you, scanning environment for possible danger).

Cognitive

- Poor memory recall and difficulty concentrating.
- Feeling confused or distracted; slower processing thoughts than normal.

Physical

- Headaches.
- Nausea or upset stomach.
- Exaggerated startle response (tendency to startle easily at loud noises).
- Fatigue or feeling slowed down.

Behavioural

- Hyperactivity, or less activity.
- Heightened tendency to behave irritably.
- Withdrawal, social isolation.
- Avoidance of activities or places that remind you of traumatic event.
- Insomnia or sleeping excessively.
- Strong need to talk about the event or read accounts about the event.
- Poor organisation e.g losing car keys

You may recognise yourself as experiencing some of the above reactions. Remember that your response is normal. Immediately following a Tragic Event you may feel disrupted, dazed, and somewhat confused. You may notice that you are not behaving as you typically would. It is important to take care of yourself as best you can. Here are some self-care suggestions for you.

Coping Tips and Strategies

- Keep in mind that the grieving/coping process will occur differently for each of us. Be as supportive of yourself in your recovery as possible. Remind yourself that it's normal and fine to take the time you need to work through.
- Be aware that you may have different coping needs at different times. Sometimes you may feel like talking, sometimes you may feel like crying, sometimes you may wish to focus your attention away from the event completely.
- Allow yourself to turn off the news and get some distance from the serious incident when you need to. It's OK (and important) to have time for laughter and fun, even during a time of grieving.
- Get plenty of rest when you're tired. And use the energy you have if you experience hyperactivity at times. Don't force yourself to be active if you don't have the energy, or rest when you don't feel tired.
- Talk to people as much as you need to. Reach out. You may experience a need to talk repetitively about the event. If you can find someone who is willing to listen, use her/him to talk to about how you are feeling.
- Spend time with others, even if you don't feel like talking. It can be very comfortable to know you're not alone. Try to find someone or someplace that feels safe and comforting to you and spend time there.
- Don't make any major life decisions or big life changes if at all possible. This is not a time to put pressure on yourself to do anything out of the ordinary. Concentrate on taking care of yourself.
- Do things that feel good to yourself – take baths, read, exercise, watch television, spend time with friends and family, fix yourself a special treat, or whatever else feels self-caring.
- Allow yourself to cry, rage, and express your feelings when you need to. Try not to numb your feelings with alcohol or drugs; this will only complicate your situation.
- Reaching out to others in a supportive way can sometimes be helpful. Such support may include volunteering time in the community. However, do not feel guilty if you do not have the energy to help others when you are coping with a Tragic Event.

The Process of Recovery

It is important to know that recovering is a process that may take a long time.

The initial response of disruption (perhaps alternating with numbness) may last days, weeks or longer. Don't be surprised if you continue to experience these reactions for longer than you

expected. See Appendix 'A Guide for Parents and Carers of Children/Young People Affected by Serious incident'.

It is impossible to predict how long you will experience effects of responding to a Tragic Event, but usually reactions gradually decrease over time. If you experience another stressful event while recovering from the experience, you may find that your reactions reappear for a while. This reactivation, or delayed response, is perfectly normal.

At any time during this process, you may find it useful to ask for professional help from a counsellor or mental health professional. There are some circumstances under which you should definitely get professional help:

- If you find yourself feeling suicidal or contemplating suicide.
- If you find that your daily functioning continues to be impaired so that you cannot carry out your life tasks.
- If post-trauma fears interfere with your ability to return to certain places or situations that remind you of a trauma.

Further information can be obtained from:

Highland Council Psychological Service
11-13 Culcabock Avenue
Inverness
IV2 3RG

Telephone Number: - 01463 644400

email PsychologicalService@highland.gov.uk.

It is strongly advised that schools develop their own Tragic Events Procedure - Being Wise before the Event. This can be developed with the support of their liaison EP using the guide available in Appendix B. It is also recommended that staff access specific Change, Loss and Bereavement Training – information about such training can found in the Useful Resources section of this Guidance.

RESPONDING TO TRAGIC EVENTS

USEFUL RESOURCES

Training

Change, Loss and Bereavement Training

It is important that all staff feel confident in supporting pupils, supporting each other and implementing these guidelines. To this end it is desirable that the whole school staff have some awareness of change, loss bereavement through a whole school training if possible. This would at a minimum include the C,L,B awareness raising training - information about this can be found on the C,L,B website – www.clbhighland.com. Further information about a wider range of change, loss and bereavement training can also be found on this site. All staff in school can also access the Education Scotland Professional Learning Activity on grief and loss. It can be accessed at <https://professionallearning.education.gov.scot/my-account/> and requires staff to register. If staff then search 'grief' the activity will appear. Although this training currently links to professional standards for care commission and GTC it is open registration – so is open to all staff.

Further advice can also be sought from your liaison Educational Psychologist and/or Primary Mental Health Worker.

Seasons for Growth

The Seasons for Growth programme draws upon extensive research in developing a sound educative response to change, loss and grief. Seasons for Growth is a programme for children, young people or adults who have experienced significant change or loss.

Seasons for Growth is based on the belief that change, loss and grief are a normal and valuable part of life. We examine the impact of changes such as death, separation, divorce, and natural disaster on our lives, and explore how we can learn to live with and grow from these experiences.

The core intentions of this programme are the development of resilience and emotional literacy to promote social and emotional wellbeing. The programme is educational in nature and does not provide therapy. It is built upon a recognised model of grief – Worden's Tasks of Grieving.

If you require further information, please contact Isabel Shaver at the Highland Council Psychological Service, Culcabock Avenue; Inverness IV2 3RG.

Suicide Prevention Training - ASIST

Shown by major studies to significantly reduce suicidality; the ASIST model teaches effective intervention skills while helping to build suicide prevention networks in the community.

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) is for everyone 16 or older—regardless of prior experience.

If you require further information, please contact Emma Campbell (Team Lead -Primary Mental Health Worker).

Extended Support Services

The Psychological Service, Primary Mental Health Worker, Practice Lead, School Nurse and Children's Services Workers can offer support to those likely to have important responsibilities to fulfil in the event of a tragic event following the principles below.

Seeking Further Support

Religious Representations

It may be helpful to involve religious representatives, ministers, priests etc. in discussions about memorial services, special assemblies etc.

The Crocus Group

The Crocus Group offer a service to young people who have suffered from bereavement. They aim to help, support and manage bereaved children/young people. They generally take referrals in relation to children 6 months after they have been bereaved.

The Crocus Group
Hospice
01463 704000 ext.6092

The Maggie Organisation

www.maggiescentres.org/

National Organisations

Each of these organisations provides key information about supporting children, young people or adults who are bereaved. Most have telephone lines which parents and professionals can contact for advice and information.

Child Bereavement Network

CBN supports professionals working with bereaved children and young people.

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk>

Many bereaved children are left #LostForWords by death, others simply haven't enough words to express themselves. This resource from CBN shares supportive words and emojis from children who know how it feels - <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/media/97729/Lost-For-Words-Benjamin-Brooks-Dutton.pdf>

Staying connected when someone is seriously ill

<http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/media/102504/Keeping-in-touch.pdf>

Child Bereavement UK

Provides information, advice and guidance to parents/carers and professionals who support bereaved children and young people. They have made a short video about supporting bereaved children through difficult times.

Telephone number: 0800 02 888 40.

You can also use live chat functions via their website. www.childbereavementuk.org

Winston's Wish

Provide information, advice and guidance to parents/carers and professionals supporting bereaved children. Their Freephone national helpline (08088 020 021), along with ASK email (ask@winstonswish.org) and online chat services are available.

www.winstonswish.org

Cruse Bereavement Care

Has many resources on bereavement and grief. It covers some of the different situations and emotions bereaved people may have to deal with. The Scottish branch helpline (calls cost 5p per minute) telephone number is 0845 6002227

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

Hope Again

Hope Again is the youth website of [Cruse Bereavement Care](http://www.cruse.org.uk). It aims to be a safe place where young people can learn from other young people - how to cope with grief and feel less alone. Free telephone(0800 8808 1677) and email support for bereaved young people available Monday to Friday

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

hopeagain@cruse.org.uk

Young Minds

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/grief-and-loss/>

Seesaw

Offers advice, information and training when there has been a death in the school community, this booklet might be of particular interest - Supporting under 5s when someone important has died – advice for parents/ carers and pre-school staff

https://www.seesaw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/seesaw_under-fives-booklet_WEB2-1.pdf

National Autistic Society

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/bereavement.aspx>

Marie Curie

Provides practical information and support for those who have been bereaved

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/globalassets/media/documents/how-we-can-help/booklets-pdfs-only/supporting-children-and-young-people-when-someone-dies.pdf>

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/globalassets/media/documents/how-we-can-help/booklets-pdfs-only/supporting-children-and-young-people-when-someone-has-a-terminal-illness.pdf>

Samaritans

Samaritans is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland, often through their telephone helpline. Samaritans helpline is available 24/7 on 116 123 and a call to this number does not show up on phone bills.

Samaritans has launched a new self-help app. It offers things like a mood tracker, techniques for problem solving, accept or change activities for worries/situations and challenging negative beliefs. It has relaxation techniques for body and mind as well as many other activities for distractions too. Also, crucially offering a "safety plan" designed specifically *for* the service user, *by* the service user.

It can be accessed at <https://selfhelp.samaritans.org/accounts/login/?next=/> and from there you can download the app. The Samaritans number is also easily accessible on the app.

Samaritans supports schools, college communities and other youth settings across the UK and Republic of Ireland through postvention services, lesson plans and school talks.

Papyrus

Papyrus is a UK charity for the prevention of young suicide (under 35). For confidential suicide prevention advice contact HOPELINEUK – open 9am-12am (midnight) every day of the year. [HOPELINEUK](#) is a confidential support and advice service for:

- Children and Young People under the age of 35 who are experiencing thoughts of suicide
- Anyone concerned that a young person could be thinking about suicide

<https://www.papyrus-uk.org/>

Telephone number: 0800 068 41 41

Further resources:

Cards from Child Bereavement Network



Download this [card](#) with suggestions from young

people who've been through it.

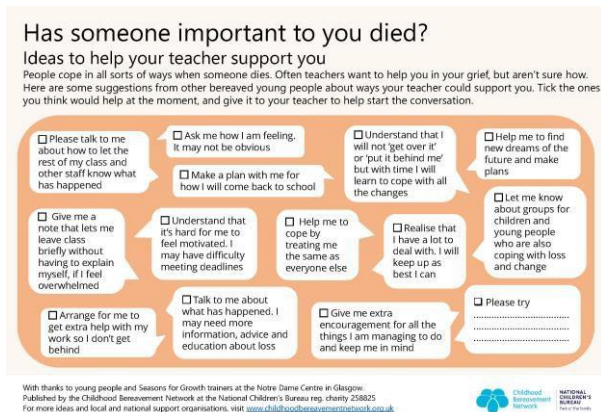
Getting support from those around you



Download the [card](#)



Download the [card](#)



[Download the card](#)

When People Die:

Stories from Young People is a comic that tells numerous stories about death and resilience from a group of young people.

https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/40776533/Comics_Bereavement_Final_a_.pdf

How to be Harry's Friend:

Read by Gavin Mitchell of Still Game. This is a story made by the BBC and read by Gavin Mitchell of Still Game about a young boy called Isaac can help his friend Harry when his mum dies

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0824x6v>

Video & Booklet Saying Goodbye when someone very special dies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnIYOmeAZE>

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/eafec4d8-5699-4f34-8342-9c3de45c26af>

The Small Creature – British Heart Foundation

A British Heart Foundation film for children aged 3 to 8 who are coming to terms with the death of a loved one.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cO2LBBtAlhttp://www.rebeccasutherland.co.uk/filter/British-Heart-Foundation/The-Small-Creature-Animation>

Books

Below are a small list of books recommended books, a larger and more varied booklist can be found at www.clbhighland.com

Information Books and Leaflets for Adults

Responding to Pupil Bereavement by Lesley Ratcliffe

(Positive Behaviour Management, 2001).

A booklet for teachers, raising awareness of the issues surrounding bereavement.

Giving Sorrow Words by Steven Killick and Stuart Lindeman.

(Lucky Duck Publishing Ltd, 1999).

A video and manual training package aiming to help children and schools deal with loss and bereavement.

Caring for Bereaved Children

(Leaflet from Cruise Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Rd, Richmond.
ISBN 0 900321 06 7)

Picking up the Pieces Handbook – A Guide for Supporting Children in Grief by Good Grief
(Good Grief Ltd – 2008)

Booklet raising awareness of the issues surrounding bereavement. Gives suggestions of strategies to support the child within your role responding to them in a way that rebuilds resilience.

Wise Before the Event – Coping with Crises in Schools by William Yule and Anne Gold.

(Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1993)

Aimed at school staff and governors: a guide for planning responses to any traumatic event.

Helping Children Cope with Grief by Rosemary Wells

(Sheldon Press (1988)

A book for adults helping bereaved children.

Workbooks for Children and Young People

Finding a Way Through When Someone has Died by Pat Mood and Lesley Whittaker (Jessica Kingsley)

A workbook by young people, for young people

Talking with Children and Young People about Death and Dying

(Jessica Kingsley)

A workbook designed to help children recognize and express feelings of grief and encourage open communication.

When Something Very Terrible Happens by Marge Heegaard

(Woodland Press, 1991)

A workbook to help children work out feelings about a traumatic event. Traumatic events in the lives of their families, friends or community leave children feeling confused, insecure and frightened. Recreating the event on paper reduces the child's terror and creates feelings of empowerment. Drawing puts the child in charge, providing the opportunity for exploring feelings. With the help of this book, nightmares and post-traumatic stress symptoms can be relieved.

When Someone Very Special Dies. Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief (Drawing Out Feelings Series) by Marge Heegaard

(Woodland Press, 1991)

A workbook to help children work out feelings about death. Provides a practical format for allowing children to understand the concept of death and develop coping skills for life. Children, with the supervision of an adult, are invited to illustrate and personalise their loss through art. When Someone Very Special Dies encourages the child to identify support systems and personal strengths.

Story Books for Young Children (up to about 7 years)

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley

(Collins, 1985)

A picture book – badger dies but leaves good memories

Fred by Posy Simmonds

(Puffin, 1989)

Fred the cat dies – a positive focus on how Fred will be remembered

Grandpa by John Burningham

(Puffin, 1989)

An account of the relationship between a little girl and grandpa through his ageing, illness and death.

RESPONDING TO TRAGIC EVENTS
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Psychological First Aid

What is Psychological First Aid (PFA)

PFA is a humane, supportive and practical response to a fellow human being who is suffering and who may need support (Sphere (2011) and IASC (2007)). It gives a framework for supporting people in ways that respect their dignity, culture and abilities. Despite its name, psychological first aid covers both social and psychological support.

PFA has been recommended by many international and national expert groups and is offered as an alternative to psychological debriefing (CISD - critical incidence stress debriefing). PFA has a long history but has become more popular since the emergence of research showings dangers of CISD. NICE guidelines recommend that CDIS should not be part of routine practice.

PFA is an approach for assisting people in the immediate aftermath of a serious incident to reduce initial distress and to foster short and long-term adaptive functioning. Other characteristics include non-intrusive pragmatic care and assessing needs. PFA does not necessarily involve discussion of the traumatic event; is not compulsory and can be done in multiple sessions. It links those who need more help to services. It deals with practical issues which are often more pressing and create stress. It also improves self-efficacy by letting people cope their own way. PFA has attempted to be culturally sensitive.

PFA seeks to promote:

- safety
- calm
- connectedness
- self-efficacy and group efficacy (belief that one's actions are likely to lead to positive outcomes and feeling able to help oneself)
- hope

Why Psychological First Aid?

People react to a serious incident with a wide range of reactions and feelings. Many people may feel overwhelmed, confused or very uncertain about what is happening. They can feel very fearful or anxious, or numb and detached. Some people may have mild reactions, whereas others may have more severe reactions. How someone reacts depends on many factors, including:

- the nature and severity of the event(s) they experience;
- their experience with previous distressing events;
- the support they have in their life from others;
- their physical health;
- their personal and family history of mental health problems;
- their cultural background and traditions;
- their age (for example, children of different age groups react differently).

Every person has strengths and abilities to help them cope with life challenges. However, some people are particularly vulnerable in a serious incident situation and may need extra help. PFA involves the following themes:

- providing practical care and support, which does not intrude;
- assessing needs and concerns;
- helping people to address basic needs (for example, food and water, information);
- listening to people, but not pressuring them to talk;
- comforting people and helping them to feel calm;
- helping people connect to information, services and social supports;
- protecting people from further harm.

What Psychological First Aid is not.

- It is not something that only professionals can do.
- It is not professional counselling.
- It is not “psychological debriefing” in that PFA does not necessarily involve a detailed discussion of the event that caused the distress.
- It is not asking someone to analyse what happened to them or to put time and events in order.
- Although PFA involves being available to listen to people’s stories, it is not about pressuring people to tell you their feelings and reactions to an event.

PFA is an alternative to “psychological debriefing”. PFA involves factors that seem to be most helpful to people’s long-term recovery. These include:

- feeling safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful;
- having access to social, physical and emotional support; and
- feeling able to help themselves, as individuals and communities.

Who is Psychological First Aid for?

PFA is for distressed people who have been recently exposed to a serious incident event, providing help to both children and adults. However, not everyone who experiences a serious incident event will need or want PFA, it is not forced on people who do not want it but is made easily available to those who may want support.

There may be situations when someone needs much more advanced support than PFA alone. Knowing limits and getting help from others, such as medical personnel (if available), is an important aspect of PSA.

When is Psychological First Aid provided?

Although people may need access to help and support for a long time after an event, PFA is aimed at helping people who have been very recently affected by a serious incident event. PFA can be provided on first contact with very distressed people. This is usually during or immediately after an event. However, it may sometimes be days or weeks after, depending on how long the event lasted and how severe it was.

Where is Psychological First Aid provided?

PFA can be offered wherever it is safe enough for to do so. This is often in community settings, such as at the scene of an accident. Ideally, try to provide PFA where there is some privacy to talk with people when appropriate. For people who have been exposed to certain types of serious incident events, such as sexual violence, privacy is essential for confidentiality and to respect the person's dignity.

APPENDIX B - Developing a School's Tragic Event Procedure – Overview

Task – being wise before the event	Timescale	Responsibility <u>Who</u>
<p>Prior preparation –Staff attend the C,L,B training.</p> <p>Do we have the following Information and is it easily accessible (in and out of school)</p> <p>1. Council Contact numbers for emergency: Area Office Area Office out of office hours number Emergency Planning Officer (01463 713479) Area Principal EP Any others?</p> <p>2. Do we have up to date class lists/ staff lists/ as well as contact details of all those in the school community?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Where are these held? How could these be located if school premises could not be accessed in the event of a tragic event? How will we inform families of those involved? Parents/carers of other pupils in school? <p>3. Do we need an emergency school direct line (as main line may be dealing with incoming calls). If using a 0800 number what message would be left? <i>(e.g. I can confirm that there has been a tragic event and those involved will be contacted directly)</i></p> <p>4. How are we going to deal with enquiries? (including media)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> E.g. HT will alert Area Office in the first instance, who may alert the Press Office. 	immediate	

<p> b. Who will answer the phones? c. Who will prepare the ‘script’? d. Is there a proforma to log all incoming calls? </p> <p>5. Who will be in our support team?</p> <p> a. Consider people’s personal circumstances – for example, it would not be advisable to include someone recently bereaved. b. Other professionals either you or Area Office would wish to contact e.g. liaison EP. </p> <p>6. Other local issues you need to consider?</p> <p>7. How would a tragic event be dealt with in term time?</p> <p><i>For example, how would things be kept as normal as possible? What type of work may pupils be given if they are in a highly emotional state?</i></p> <p>8. What would happen if a tragic event occurred outside term time?</p> <p><i>Who would need to be informed?</i></p> <p><i>Which part of the school would be open?</i></p> <p><i>Who would be available?</i></p>		
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Appendix C - Communicating the death of a child/young person or member of school staff

It is very important to acknowledge and recognise the emotional impact on the whole school community of a death of one of its pupils or staff members. No matter how prepared, or how well we know the child or staff member, the way in which the immediate family would wish that communication to take place will be extremely varied, influenced by their grief, their wishes for openness or privacy, and whether conversations have already taken place about this as part of planning. Balancing a need to sensitively communicate to the school community to prevent hearing distorted, inaccurate or potentially disturbing information via 'the grapevine' against privacy wishes can be challenging, but equally may result in anger from the family. Every situation is different and non-transferable, but the following guidance may be helpful.

- Alert the Area Care and Learning Manager immediately of any expected or sudden death and involve the liaison Educational Psychologist and Primary Mental Health Worker as appropriate to support the school community.
- Establish a school protocol on ways of 'breaking bad news' – 1:1, small groups, staff meeting, school assembly
- In the event of an anticipated death of a child or young person with palliative needs – find out who is the Lead Professional (usually Children's Community Nurse, Children's Nurse Specialist or SW) and ensure contact numbers are recorded
- Identify a SINGLE person from the school to act as the lead in liaising with the family and communicating with outside agencies.
- In the event of an anticipated death, try and find out the wishes of the parent in communicating this news, as part of the proactive planning ahead of the event
- Whether sudden or expected, attempt to explore the views of the family either directly or in the case of a child, via the Lead Professional. The views of the family/parents, including any request for privacy should be respected. They may have specific requests on communication with:

Teaching staff/PSAs/social carer staff

Other parents

Pupils

Child's school and schools of siblings

It would be helpful to share with them the HTs plan for the school community and gain their agreement with this, even if they don't have a strong view either way.

- Ensure the content of the news is factual, without including any distressing detail
- Ensure opportunities are given for pupils to speak to staff and for staff to speak with support services, where required.
- Look at ways of positive memory making
- Ensure all school staff are aware of strict codes of conduct re data protection, confidentiality and use of social media

- Ensure staff are aware of Highland Council's Communication team for management of press interest
- Ensure any letters that are sent out are on headed notepaper.

Appendix D - Sample Letters

Before sending a letter home to parents about the death of a pupil registered at their establishment, permission must be gained from the deceased child or young person's parents. The contents of the letter and the distribution list must be agreed by the bereaved parent/s and Head of Establishment. The letter should be sent home in a sealed envelope.

The Head Teacher will know their own school community best and can customise or develop their own letter as appropriate

Sample letter – general

Dear Parents

We are sorry to have to share the news with you that..... We would like to, as a school, send our condolences to the family. (other personal info could go here).

OR

You might already be aware of a tragic event within our community. We know that this might have caused distress to the immediate family but also to the wider community.

We realise that explaining news like this to children and young people can bring up discussions and questions that might need you to explain the situation further. We would like to support you with this, by pulling your attention to the information in the Highland Council Tragic Events Guidance ([link](#)) That helps to think about the language required to discuss with children of different ages as well as thinking about how best to support them.

We are being supported, as a school, by members of the Educational Psychology and Primary Mental Health Worker team. If you feel that you would like advice about speaking to your child or they are distressed, please let us know. We are here to support you all.

Sample of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil (Nursery/Primary early years setting).

Dear Parents

We have the sad task of informing you of the death of <Name>, a child in <Primary/Nursery>. We feel that the parents/carers are the best people to inform children of this and ask that you pass on this sad news OR Staff had the sad task today of informing the children/pupils of the death of <Name>, a child pupil in <Primary/Nursery/Year> He/She was a very popular member of the class and will be missed by everyone who knew him/her and our thoughts are with his/her family. We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. (Elaborate) It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions that he/she may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is appropriate to their

age. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at www.childbereavementuk.org and change, loss and bereavement website. We will be arranging a memorial service in the school in the next few months as a means of celebrating <Name's> life.

Yours sincerely <Name> Head Teacher

Sample of a letter informing parents of the death of a pupil (Primary).

Dear Parents/ Carers

We had the sad task of informing the children of the death of <Name>, a pupil in Primary... They were told that <name> died from an illness called cancer. Sometimes people who have cancer can get better, but other times people die from it. <Name> had been ill with cancer for a long time and died at home yesterday. When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings of sadness, anger, and confusion - these are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, and you can help by talking to them at home and answering their questions honestly. Support will be available to the school if your child is having difficulty coming to terms with this loss. Please contact your child's teacher if you wish for further support.

The funeral will take place at <Named Church or Crematorium> on <Day and Date> at <Time>. Your child may wish to attend the funeral. If this is the case, you may collect your child from school and accompany them to the church. Please inform the school of your child's absence, if this is the case.

Yours sincerely

Sample of a letter to bereaved parents

Dear

We are so very sorry to hear of <child/pupil's> death. There are no words to express the sadness of losing a child and we can only begin to imagine the anguish you must be going through. Clearly, as a school community, we will miss him/her very much and we are doing our best to offer comfort and support to his/her friends and classmates. He/She was a much-loved member of our nursery family/school community. If we can do anything to help as you plan <child/pupil's> funeral service or other memorial opportunities, please let us know. In time, we will also ensure that anything of <child/pupil's> that remains in school is returned to you, including photographs we may have on the school system. Be assured that you are in our thoughts at this very sad time and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of support in any way.

With sympathy,

Headteacher

Sample of a letter death of member of staff

Dear Parents/Carers

I am sorry to have to tell you that a valued member of our staff, [name] has died. We feel that the parents/carers are the best people to inform young children of this and ask that you pass on this sad news OR the children have been informed in school today.

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. (Elaborate) It is possible that your child may have some feelings and questions that he/she may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is appropriate to their age. You may also find some very useful advice and resources online at www.childbereavementuk.org. We will share details of the funeral as soon as they are known. Parents who wish to attend will be welcome to do so. I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news, but I appreciate an occurrence like this impacts the whole school community. I am so grateful that we, together, will be able to guide and support the children through what may be, for many, a very new experience in their lives.

Yours.....

Dear Parents/ Carers

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

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

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

When someone dies, their family and friends have lots of feelings - sadness, anger, and confusion - which are all normal. The children have been told that their teachers are willing to try and answer their questions at school, and you can help by talking to them at home and answering their questions honestly. Support will be available to the school if your child is having difficulty coming to terms with this loss. Please contact your child's teacher if you wish for further support.

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Yours sincerely

APPENDIX E - Religions and Beliefs about Death

The ways in which people deal with death and the funeral rites they carry out are usually very closely linked with their beliefs about life after death. Below are a brief description of the beliefs and customs from some of the main world religions and information on non-religious funerals.

BUDDHISM

Types of Buddhism:

- Theravada - has remained closest to the original Buddha's teaching
- Mahayana - collection of Buddhists traditions which includes Zen, Pure Land, and Tibetan Buddhism

Buddhists believe:

- in reincarnation
- everything is impermanent and that through meditation become 'awake' to this reality
- there is no permanent 'soul', people are made up of interrelated elements:
 - physical form
 - sensations/feelings
 - perceptions
 - will
 - consciousness

which disintegrate at death

- believe in **Karma** (deeds/actions). It is only the result of previous actions that ensures a new set of elements is reconstituted to create a new person
- believe in **Nirvana** – state of enlightenment and permanent liberation.

Practices:

- There is a wide variety in Buddhist belief and practice of death. The funeral is not usually viewed as a 'religious event'.
- The coffin may be taken in a decorated carriage to the hall where the funeral takes place.
- It is surrounded by flowers and gifts, which are given to the monks after the ceremony.
- Prayers are said.
- There is music and food.
- Death and reincarnation take one nearer to Nirvana so usually there is no display of grief or tears.
- Emphasis is on new life, not on death.
- The attitude is of calmness and acceptance of death.
- White is often worn at funerals.
- Coffin may be opened.
- A photograph is placed near the coffin to remind those present of the transient nature of life.
- The body is cremated.

CHRISTIANITY

The most common groups within Christianity are:

- Anglican/Church of England
- Roman Catholic
- Orthodox
- Protestants

Christians believe:

- in God
- in Jesus as the Son of God
- in eternal life - a quality of being
- that human beings are in continuing fellowship with God - throughout life and after death – soul goes on after life.
- in resurrection – the body is resurrected at the Day of Judgement
- in heaven/hell (some)
- in judgement
- For Roman Catholics, there is a state called purgatory - a place in which the soul of a person is purified ready to enter heaven.
- There is only one life to be lived

Practices:

- The practices associated with death re-affirm essential Christian beliefs and are a means of reaffirming faith in God - which will help to cope with the loss and sorrow.
- When a Christian dies, it is seen as the end of his/her life on earth. A funeral is held for friends and family to grieve for the person who has died and give thanks for their life.
- Burial was inherited from the Jews - but cremation is also common today
- The funeral service usually takes place within a week.
- The body is placed in a coffin and taken to a church.
- Funeral service consists of bible readings/prayers/music. The actual service structure varies according to which branch of Christianity is followed. For example, in the Roman Catholic faith there may be a Mass.
- In Protestant/Anglican rites there is a great emphasis on Hope of resurrection
- Diversity in practice e.g. Irish 'wake' – body laid in at the coffin with the lid open at dead person's home. Family and friends will sit around the coffin, talking praying and sometimes singing.
- Wreaths: traditionally these are round to symbolise continuity and eternity
- Colour of mourning = black (until 8th Century white)
- It is acceptable to display grief with tears - this has been encouraged by the 'church' as a means of coping with loss.
- Memorial service may be held later. Memorials can be affected more by social pressures rather than beliefs, so it is not necessarily a religious event.

HUMANISM

Humanists believe:

- that death is a natural end to life
- that death should be as painless as possible, hence support for voluntary euthanasia
- that there is no 'future life' or 'heaven', punishment/reward
- that there is no supernatural dimension

Practices:

- Legally there need be no ceremony at all; the undertaker could dispose of the body. However, humanists are extremely sensitive towards the needs of the living. So there may be non-religious funeral ceremonies or memorial meetings.
- The form of the ceremony is determined by the relatives and the wishes of the deceased. Usually there is a simple ceremony at the crematorium or burial ground. This can be taken by a Humanist Official – celebrant.
- A key and distinctive element of the ceremony will be the remembrance and commemoration of the dead person's achievements in life.
- The ceremony can include music, poetry and readings.

HINDUISM

Hindus believe:

- that each person has a soul which is permanent and unchanging
- that at death the soul sheds its body and 'puts on' another body (not necessarily human) in an endless cycle of re-births. Finally, it will reach God
- in the transmigration of souls
- that during life one passes through 16 stages. The stages are called SAMSKARAS
- in one God - Brahman
- that the physical body is made of Fire, Air, Earth, Water
- cremation returns the body to fire/air
- burial returns the body to earth
- that death brings impurity into the home
- in the law of KARMA (deeds) N.B. There is tremendous diversity/range within Hinduism particularly as it is affected by regional factors/practices.

Practices:

- A priest usually conducts the funeral.
- The body is wrapped in a new cloth and placed in a coffin. Sometimes gifts are included e.g. piece of gold or silver and garland of flowers/beads.
- The body is usually cremated within 24 hours of death.
- The coffin is carried to the place of cremation by 6 male relatives. Close female relatives are discouraged from attending the cremation - distress (cultural rather than religious)
- The coffin is covered with flowers. Ghee is poured over it to help it burn. The eldest son should set the coffin alight. In Britain - press button at crematorium
- Readings about reincarnation are selected from the Holy Books
- 3 days after cremation the ashes are collected and scattered on a river – River Ganges if at all possible
- Colour of mourning = white.

- Friends and relatives bring gifts to the family, keep them company, share grief and support them on 11th/ 13th day - all will gather to offer 'Pinda' (rice balls) and milk - to the dead person - this is to show they are grateful for the acts of kindness which they received during his/her lifetime. The eldest son or other male relative will have their head shaved as a sign of bereavement and cleansing.
- After the 13th day, public mourning ends in a large feast, after which only private, personal grief remains.
- Memory is preserved in daily worship
- Some Hindus hold feast and make donations to charities at 3,6,9 month or yearly intervals.

ISLAM

Groups within Islam:

- Sunni
- Shia
- Ahmadiyya
- Sufi
- Ishmaeli

Muslims believe:

- there is one God - Allah
- that Muhammad is the prophet of God
- that they must submit to the will of Allah
- that there is only one life to be lived
- in physical resurrection of the body
- in judgement - Paradise everlasting - no intermediate stage - Hell is strict and impartial justice
- that there will be a day of judgement - cosmic upheaval, each soul will be judged according to deeds while on earth
- that when a person dies their soul is looked after by the angel of death in a place called Barzakh (for one day) until God finally judges the world
- that death is temporary separation
- that extravagant expressions of grief are rebellion against the 'will of Allah'

Practices:

- Mourning is demonstrated by readings from the Qur'an - in this way the bereaved are supported and comforted by their faith.
- Prior to death, friends and relatives will gather and read from the Qur'an. The dying person always tries to say the Shahadah.
- Burial takes place within 24 hours. (Bury as believe in physical resurrection).
- The body is washed, perfumed and wrapped in three pieces of white cotton (shroud) - men by men and women by women.
- Coffins will not be used – unless required by law. The body will be buried with the face towards the MAKKAH.
- The grave will not be marked by a monument or tombstone
- The family (traditionally) stays indoors for 3 days after the funeral - they will not cook. Friends and relatives will bring food to them.

- The grave may be visited every Friday for 40 days.
- The mourning period will last up to 3 months. During this time there will be no celebrations or weddings.
- During EID celebrations, visits will be made to the cemetery to say prayers at family graves - this is a reminder that even in midst of happy celebrations - life is temporary and it is important to live correctly to ensure eternal life with Allah.

JUDAISM

Groups within Judaism:

- Orthodox:
 - Hassidic (Ultra-orthodox)
 - Sephardic (Mediterranean/ Middle Eastern)
 - Ashkenazi (European)
- Reform
- Liberal

Jews believe:

- in one God
- that there is only one life to be lived
- that after death the soul goes to the 'world to come' (OLAM HA'BA)
- that they should focus on what is involved in being faithful to God in this life and contributing to humanity.
- orthodox believe in resurrection of the body (cremation forbidden)
- orthodox believe in the coming of a Messiah - at which time all souls will return to their bodies
- Reform Jews use the expression of 'life eternal' for resurrection of the body (cremation permitted)

Practices:

- The key in relation to practice is to concentrate on support for the close relatives whilst ensuring that the memory of the individual is retained.
- The last words a Jew will say before death is the SHEMA. Within 24 hours the body will be ideally buried. The body will be washed, dressed and placed in a plain coffin.
- There will be no flowers - to ensure that there is no distinction between rich and poor. Mourners will cut a slit in their outer clothes as a mark of grief.
- The cemetery – Bet Hayyim- means 'house of life'. Everyone will participate in the interment by filling the grave with earth. The closest male relative will say the prayer - Kaddish - to help the dead person's soul to Olam Ha'ba.
- For one whole week the family will 'sit in mourning' - friends will provide food for them, they are encouraged to express their grief and talk about their loved one. For a month they will not participate in any entertainment. There is a gradual reduction in the intensity of the mourning in order to aid re-adjustment.
- For the following 11 months Kaddish is said every day. Mourning is for 12 months.

- Each year on the anniversary of the death the family say kaddish and burn a candle for 24 hours. The grave should be visited at least once a year – especially just before the Jewish New Year to ensure that cherished memories do not fade and to comfort the bereaved.

SIKHISM

Sikhs believe:

- in one God
- in reincarnation
- in heaven and hell - a soul may rest for a while before returning to earth. The soul will be corrected and/or rewarded. Heaven/Hell are temporary dwelling place– person's soul may be reborn several times.
- that there will be union with God - after human beings have progressed upwards through many existences from the lower forms of life. This union is described as 'merging' with God
- that death is to be welcomed as removing the last obstacle to the complete union of God and the believer (hence do not encourage mourning).

Practices:

- Before death - friends and relatives say the Sukhmani - psalm/song of peace from the Holy Book (**Guru Granth Sahib**)
- The body is washed and dressed by friends and relatives will make gifts of money and oil. The coffin is taken to the Gurdwara. The Gurdwara is the focus for all ceremonies rather than the home.
- In the Punjab, the body would be cremated.
- Only male relatives attend the service and then they will return to the Gurdwara for readings/prayers/hymns. The service ends with the distribution of Kara Parshad (offering of food) and a feast. This to symbolise the continuity of social life as opposed to the isolation from human contacts and normal activities – also the rejection of fasting and other ritual manifestations of grief.
- The ashes of the dead body are scattered on a Holy River.
- Money is donated to charities.
- For 10 days the family will read from the Guru Granth Sahib (mourning period).
- Relatives and close friends will keep the family company, comfort them, share grief and support them.

From Harrow Psychological Services Guidance for schools and other children's services - June 2010

Appendix F - Grief Reactions

Grief Reactions – include Thoughts and Feelings, Emotions, Physical and Behavioural Reactions. Response to grief and stress in all ages can include some of the following:

Emotional Reactions	Physical Reactions	Behavioural Reactions
Shock	Dizziness	Fight, Flight, Freeze Responses
Disbelief	Shaking	Tearfulness
Denial	Nausea	Black Humour
Anger	Changes in Breathing	Irritability
Guilt	Loss of Appetite	Bad Dreams
Longing	Tiredness	Increased Risk-Taking Behaviour
Shame	Insomnia	Flash-back
Anxiety	Memory Loss	Hyper-vigilance
Fear	Lack of Attention and Concentration	Aggression

Schools report they have found this Practice Paper helpful and we value feedback. If you have suggestions about other information that should be included or would like to make any other comments, please contact your liaison EP.

APPENDIX G – Interventions for Recovery

Following a serious incident your child might:

- Develop a fear of the dark or be afraid of being alone
- Become clingy; have problems sleeping; want to sleep in parent's room; have toileting accidents
- Become quiet and withdrawn
- Have difficulty concentrating
- Have unexplained tantrums

How can I support my child?

If children are to overcome the effects of a serious incident they need help to regain their sense of emotional safety. Parents and other trusted adults could help them do this.

Remember...

- Provide lots of reassurance and comforting
- Maintain regular routines such as attending nursery or school
- Provide firm limits, these help to maintain a sense of security.
- Correct any misunderstandings about the serious incident
- Protect from further fright or unnecessary separations
- Provide opportunities for play
- Monitor their play at home and in school

Listen to and accept their fears
Listen to and accept their strong feelings
and vivid memories of the serious incident

My child won't talk to me

After a serious incident it is not unusual for children to keep things to themselves. Usually, this is because they do not want to upset adults. Sometimes it's because they blame themselves.

If you are worried about your child you might like to talk to someone who works with children, such as:

- Headteacher
- Class Teacher
- Children's Support Worker
- GP
- psychologist

**Interventions
for
Recovery**

**A Guide for
Parents and Carers
of
Children / Young
People
Affected By
Serious incident**

What is a serious incident?

The dictionary describes a serious incident as "a time of danger or great difficulty". Many children know about serious incident through personal experience of:

- Parental separation or divorce
- Witnessing parental violence
- Death of a relative or friend
- Serious illness of a relative or friend
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Serious accidents or fire
- Bullying

How do children react to serious incident?

There is no such thing as a typical reaction. Children react to serious incident in different ways. Most children show changes in their behaviour. These changes might appear immediately or not until weeks or months later. You might notice changes at home, school, or both. Reactions are often short lived. How long they last depends on many factors including the nature of the serious incident, their age, family circumstances and the support available from family and friends.

When changes appear immediately following the serious incident, they are easier to understand.

When the reactions appear much later their importance can easily be overlooked or misunderstood because adults do not link the change in behaviour to the serious incident.

Instead, adults might come to believe that the child is just being difficult and unco-operative.

What should I look for?

If your child has been through a serious incident the main things to look out for are changes in how they think, feel and behave.

Thoughts and feelings

It can be difficult to notice changes in children's thoughts and feelings especially if they can't put into words what is troubling them.

Following a serious incident, children often begin to think and feel differently about

themselves and others. The same is true of adults.

Following serious incident children often:

Think that they are responsible for the serious incident; that they did something wrong; they may blame themselves.

Feel unsafe and insecure; they may feel guilty, become easily upset by everyday events.

Do not know why they feel the way they do and need help to talk about and understand their feelings.

Behaviour

It's easier to spot changes in your child's behaviour. Others may notice too - friends, relatives and your child's teacher - so it's worth asking them.

Young children often express their fears and worries through their play - so observe their play.

If your child attends nursery or school, ask staff about their play.

APPENDIX H – Interventions for Recovery

Following a serious incident, a child might:

- Develop a fear of the dark or be afraid of being alone
- Become clingy; have problems sleeping; want to sleep in parent's room; have toileting accidents
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- Have difficulty concentrating
- Have unexplained tantrums

How can I support the child in your care?

If children are to overcome the effects of a serious incident, they need help to regain their sense of emotional safety. Parents and other trusted adults could help them do this.

Remember...

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- Maintain regular routines such as attending nursery or school
- Provide firm limits, these help to maintain a sense of security.
- Correct any misunderstandings about the serious incident
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- Monitor their play at home and in school

Listen to and accept their fears
Listen to and accept their strong feelings and vivid memories of the serious incident

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**Interventions
for
Recovery**

**A Guide for
Care Staff**

**Children / Young
People**

**Affected By
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