



HEADLANDS SCHOOL
SINCE 1965

Responding to unexpected death Policy

Written by	Executive Headteacher		
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Introduction

This toolkit was jointly developed by Public Health, Schools, Colleges, the Community & Voluntary Sector, NHS Colleagues, and the Police. It has been adapted by Headlands School, but includes support from the following ERYC teams: Safeguarding, Educational Psychology Service, MHEW in Education.

Whilst there is a focus on suicide, the principles included apply to any unexpected death.

Although unexpected deaths in children and young people are uncommon, it is helpful to be prepared, as a sensitive and considerate response, tailored to the person who has died and taking their family's wishes into account, can improve the long-term outcomes for those impacted.

Leading the response to an unexpected death can feel overwhelming. You are not alone in this process and the Local Authority will prioritise supporting your school community to respond and recover. It is important that you work as a team, look after each other, and seek support for yourself.

A Checklist for Responding to Unexpected Death

This checklist is designed to guide you through the process of responding to an unexpected death. Please read the full checklist before progressing through each step. Additional information to support you to complete each step, including scripts and templates are provided in the guidance and the appendices.

Task	Named Lead
1. The Immediate Response	
1.1 Safety first: if the death happened onsite, make sure your staff and students are safe.	
1.2 Did anyone witness the death? Ensure any witnesses are supported.	
1.3 Ensure those affected (students / staff) are not left alone.	
1.4 If the incident has happened offsite, find out as many of the facts and circumstances as possible.	
1.5 Contact your Local Authority (LA) as soon as possible - they will prioritise attendance and support at your setting.	
1.6 Be sensitive to confidentiality. Sharing details including the child's name cannot happen without permission.	
1.7 Keep a daily record of the school's actions.	
Pause; take some time to step back, have a break and grab a drink / something to eat. Self-care is essential to your ability to respond.	
2. The First Day at School	
2.1 Convene your School Critical Incident Team to work with the Local Authority staff - find a suitable space in which the team can work.	
2.2 Ask your team to highlight vulnerable students and staff who may be at risk of harm - your LA will assist with triaging any vulnerable people at risk including safety planning and support.	
2.3 Establish how the bereaved / affected family would like to communicate with the school and reach out to them.	
2.4. Inform your Chair of Governors.	
2.5 Find a welcoming, safe space for supporting students in the school. Make sure everyone knows this is available.	
2.6 Talk to your staff. Trauma can cause confusion and feel frightening - consistent messages are crucial.	
2.7 Talk to your students in small groups.	
2.8 Inform parents / carers about the death.	
2.9 Inform the wider community about the death.	
2.10 The death of a young person can often attract media attention. Assign one member of the School Critical Incident Team to be responsible for media liaison.	
2.11 You may be asked to attend an information sharing meeting within 24 hours.	
Pause; take some time to step back, have a break - encourage your team to do the same. Self-care is essential to your ability to respond. Accept support where you can.	

3. The First Week	
3.1	Restore your setting to its regular routine - but continue to be aware of issues that may evolve.
3.2	Discuss funeral and memorial with your School Critical Incident Team and the LA, keeping the family's wishes in mind.
3.3	Consider the places the student normally spent time, as well as the place of death. Discuss how this might affect students with your School Critical Incident Team.
3.4	Collect all the belongings of the deceased for the police and family - ensure that you and your staff are supported to do this as this can be a difficult task.
3.5	Review upcoming curriculum themes - is there anything with the potential to re-traumatise?
3.6	Look for opportunities to promote healthy grieving and emotional wellbeing within the curriculum.
3.7	Continue to identify and support your vulnerable students with support from the LA. Review attendance.
3.8	Review the opportunities for students to access support with Emotional and Mental Health and build capacity where needed e.g., additional counselling resource, activities.
3.9	Attend relevant information sharing meetings with key agencies - it may be useful to have another member of the School Crisis Management Team to attend with you.
3.10	Plan regular staff meetings, to ensure they are provided with up-to-date information and know where to access support for students and themselves.
3.11	Monitor staff wellbeing.
3.12	Continue to update parents / carers and the wider school community.
3.13	Continue to document the school's actions - this can be useful for learning lessons and response planning, as well as record keeping.
	Take some time to reflect and access support; taking care of yourself is important.
4. The First Month	
4.1	Continue to monitor staff and student wellbeing - make sure everyone knows how to access support.
4.2	Consider the possible impact of important school year events (school photographs, award nights, prom).
4.3	Gather information from your staff to contribute to a critical incident review - staff may need support with this sensitive task.
4.4	Conduct a critical incident review - staff may need support with this sensitive task.
4.5	Clearly communicate sources of support to parents / carers and consider offering information sessions from a mental health professional.
4.6	Continue to document the school's actions - this can be useful for learning lessons and response planning, as well as record keeping.
4.7	Review upcoming Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing curriculum themes - is there anything you can use to promote healthy grieving and emotional wellbeing? Is there anything with the potential to re-traumatise?
4.8	Review wellbeing and attendance data.
4.9	Continue to update parents / carers and the wider school community.

	Take some time to reflect and access support; taking care of yourself is important at every stage of the response.	
5. The Longer Term		
	5.1 Continue to monitor staff and student wellbeing - make sure everyone knows how to access support.	
	5.2 Continue to update parents / carers and the wider school community where this is needed.	
	5.3 Increase monitoring of school wellbeing and plan support for anniversaries, birthdays and other significant events.	
	5.4 Implement the recommendations of the critical incident review - how can you apply those lessons learned?	
	5.5 Consider offering further training for staff to enable them to respond to another event like this.	
	5.6 Include any new policies or key learning in the staff induction process.	
	Take some time to reflect and access support; taking care of yourself is important at every stage of the response. Remember to be kind to yourself when you are discussing lessons learned.	

1. Immediate response

1.1 **Safety first: if the death happened onsite, make sure your staff and students are safe.**

Call 999 for the Emergency Services and provide first aid. Secure and block the site to prevent further witnesses. Police may need to inspect the area so do not remove or disturb items from the site.

If needs be, limit access to any potentially dangerous materials and make changes to the environment in order to keep others safe.

1.2 **Did anyone witness the death? Ensure any witnesses are supported.**

If there are witnesses, move them to a safe, supervised location and ensure staff are available to provide comfort and support. Police may wish to take statements.

1.3 **Ensure those affected (students / staff) are not left alone.**

Ensure that anyone affected by witnessing / hearing about the death is supported. Some individuals who are upset may want privacy, in such cases, nominate a member of staff to discreetly observe their whereabouts for safety.

1.4 **If the incident has happened offsite, find out as many of the facts and circumstances as possible.**

Keep a record of any information shared with staff via notes / emails / messages and do not ignore rumours. If needs be, confirm facts with the police. Although the school may already have information about the death, including misinformation, wait and talk with the Local Authority before sending out any correspondence with parents / carers, students and the main staff body.

1.5 **Contact your Local Authority as soon as possible - they will prioritise attendance and support at your setting.**

When a death in the community occurs offsite, schools will be notified via a number of routes including the police, the hospital, the Local Authority, the Child Death Overview Panel Team or the family of the deceased.

The key to ensuring a prompt, holistic, multi-agency response is early communication with a range of professionals. You are not alone in this process, and colleagues in the Local Authority will visit you on the first school day following the incident, answer any questions you have about the process, procedures and timelines, and provide guidance and support throughout the response.

In the event of an unexpected death occurring in the school grounds or the family contacting the school first, make contact with the Local Authority as soon as possible. To ensure a rapid response, contact all of the services below to inform them of what has happened:

During office hours (08:30 - 16:30) schools should contact:

- Margo Smith, Business Manager, CYPSSS - 07800 853363 to reflect the child in crisis element of the situation

Out of hours (16:30 - 08:30) schools should contact:

- the Out of Hours Service on **07800 853363**.

1.6 Be sensitive to confidentiality. Sharing details including the child's name cannot happen without permission.

There are important considerations to make before contacting anyone in the school community about the death. Before making any decisions or sending out any communications, *ensure you have talked this through with a contact at the Local Authority*. If possible, wait until after the Initial Information Sharing and Planning Meeting (IISPM) (see **3.9**) where all information available is reviewed and actions are identified.

The family must give consent to any information and detail that will be shared, including the language that is used. If the death is a suspected suicide, use the term 'unexpected death' unless suicide has been confirmed by the Coroner *and* the family have given permission for the death to be described as suicide.

When discussing suicide and self-harm, retain *official-sensitive* handling of this information and follow the advice below from Humberside Police.

Official-sensitive handling of information ensures data protection, respects confidentiality and reduces harm. Inaccurate and misleading information about suicide and self-harm can cause real-world harm to children and young people, modify the risk of contagion and cause adverse negative reactions to people who receive it.

It is essential for all agencies to be able to have confidence that the information discussed around self-harm and suicide will not be shared in an unstructured manner that could modify the risk of contagion effect*.

* Suicide contagion is the **exposure to suicide or suicidal behaviours within one's family, one's peer group, or through media reports of suicide** and can result in an increase in suicide and suicidal behaviours.

The Local Authority will support you to ensure that all communication shared is appropriate.

1.7 Keep a daily record of the school's actions.

This information may be needed for subsequent inquiry and is helpful when considering lessons learned.

Record:

- All decisions and actions taken by the school
- All offers of help including the name of the agency, what they are offering, a contact name and number. These agencies may be contacted later if appropriate
- Names of officers from the Emergency Services and any other external agencies which you contact. Note actions you take or help that you ask for
- A telephone log of all incoming and outgoing calls. This will also help identify the people who have been and still need to be spoken to
- Inquiries received
- Parents / carers contacted

2. The First Day at School

N.B any communications relating to a suspected suicide should not include details of the method used, details of any note, speculation over the motive, or language that romanticises / glorifies / vilifies the death. Focus on the person and sources of support for those affected.

If the death has happened during the school holidays, see [Appendix A - Responding When a Death has Occurred During the school Holidays](#)

2.1 Convene your School Critical Incident Team to work with the Local Authority staff, find a suitable space in which the team can work.

At the time of a crisis there are a large number of tasks to be carried out. By identifying a School Critical Incident Team with clear roles, settings can share the workload and ensure that important elements in the response are not forgotten.

Although the Headteacher, Mrs Bone, has ultimate responsibility for management oversight and implementation, it is important that other staff also contribute so that the Headteacher does not feel overburdened. Staff members should be suited to the role; they should have an interest in this type of work and relevant training / skills (e.g., good interpersonal skills, organisational skills, a calm approach). If a member of staff has been recently bereaved, they may not be a suitable candidate for the team.

The following table outlines roles and responsibilities for a School Critical Incident Team. In most cases, members will be Senior Leaders, Pastoral Leads, and Administrators. In a smaller setting, staff may take on more than one role.

School Critical Incident Team Role	Main Responsibilities
Team Lead and Emergency Services Contact	Team management oversight and implementation. Liaison with Emergency Services (likely to be the Headteacher)
Family Contact	Initial contact with and ongoing communication with bereaved family (likely to be the Head / Deputy Headteacher)
Parents/Carers Contact	Liaison with parents / carers and the local community as required
Student Wellbeing	Management of students' needs through all phases
Staff Wellbeing	Management of staffs' needs through all phases
Media Contact	Liaison with Press Office and all aspects of media enquiry
Routine Management	Supports adjustments needed (e.g., support room, additional staffing, funeral arrangements) whilst maintaining routine
Administrator	Maintains records and ensures telephone numbers for parents / carers, staff, emergency services are up to date. Provides relevant handouts. Sends out letters, emails, texts as directed by Team Lead.

Once you have assembled your team, meet together to share the facts known at this stage and to plan a response. Staff from the Local Authority Critical Incident Team will support this meeting wherever possible, to assist you. A sample agenda for the initial meeting can

be found in [Appendix B - Sample Agenda for First Meeting of school Crisis Management Team](#)

Feedback from Headteachers has been that the first few days can feel both simultaneously lonely and overwhelming with the many offers of help from individuals and agencies. The professionals listed below will work collectively to support you as required:

The Educational Psychologist(s) (EP) will: take their lead from Mrs Bone and will support the School Critical Incident Team to manage the incident effectively. EPs provide immediate, short-term support, information and advice to staff, and help to develop coping mechanisms from within the school's own resources. The primary role of the EP is to advise and support the teachers and other adults who work daily with students and who know them well. Best practice indicates that students need to be with people they know and trust. It is, therefore, better if school staff provide support for students as they will be around in the longer term and will be in a better position to monitor their students over the days and weeks following an incident.

The EP will be able to provide Psychological First Aid for individuals, pairs or small groups of staff as required. EPs can support with coordinating offers and advising on how best to avail of and manage the various resources available. If a joint-agency decision has been made to provide a drop-in session for parents / carers, an EP can usually be available to provide support. The EP can also support with contacting any schools affected e.g., feeder schools.

Once the LA has been notified of the critical incident, a Senior Manager will contact the Headteacher to offer / facilitate further support as appropriate to the emerging situation, and in liaison with the LA Critical Incident Team. Depending on the context, this could include support for the Headteacher, support from a member of the safeguarding team or signposting other sources of support such as communications.

Police will: investigate the incident and any criminal proceedings as required. Involvement from the Police will differ depending on the cause of death and until that is confirmed it may initially be treated as a crime scene. If crime is suspected or confirmed the Police may be at the school for some time, possibly several days. If the matter becomes a criminal investigation a Family Liaison officer will be provided to the family.

Healthcare providers, Humberside Police, Local Authority and NHS staff will: meet to discuss the death, plan a response and learn from what happened:

- The Initial Information Sharing and Planning Meeting (IISPM) is convened by Children's Social Care, and usually happens on the next working day following a death. The Headteacher and other members of Senior Staff may be invited.
- A Child Death Review Meeting will be held once the results of the final post-mortem and other clinical investigations are available. The Headteacher and other members of Senior Staff may be invited.
- The Child Death Overview Panel meets bi-monthly to anonymously discuss child deaths in the local area, in order to learn lessons and share any findings for the prevention of future deaths. school staff do not routinely attend this meeting.

2.2 Ask your team to highlight vulnerable students and staff who may be at risk of harm - your LA will assist with triaging any vulnerable people at risk including safety planning and support.

The Local Authority will support you with the process of identifying your most at risk students, by looking at vulnerabilities due to the impact of the event, pre-existing vulnerabilities and / or shared characteristics with deceased. It is helpful to start thinking about who these young people might be as soon as possible.

It is not always possible to know who is most affected by the death, but some students will need to be more closely monitored as they may be more vulnerable than others:

- Close friends and relatives of the deceased
- Students who experienced a recent loss, death of a friend or relative, family divorce or separation, break-up with a romantic partner
- Students with a history of mental health difficulties
- Students with a history of substance abuse
- Students experiencing serious family difficulties, including serious mental or physical illness
- Students who have been bereaved in the past
- Students with a history of sexual abuse
- Students with a history of suicide attempts / self-harm
- Non-communicative students who have difficulty talking about their feelings
- Less able students
- Students with a refugee background
- Racialized communities who have experienced more death and trauma during the Covid-19 pandemic

Ensure you have made arrangements to support vulnerable students at break, lunch, and home time as well as during lesson time. The attendance patterns of students should be closely monitored at this time, and any absences followed up on with parents / carers.

If the death was a suspected suicide, you may be asked to highlight at risk students using the Circles of Vulnerability Model. Vulnerability is mapped according to proximity to death in three regards: geographical, social or psychological. For more information, see [Appendix C - Circles of Vulnerability](#).

In the weeks and months following a suicide there is a heightened risk for all students and in particular vulnerable students. The Local Authority will work with you to minimise the risk of contagion, by ensuring vulnerable students are identified and supported, and that all students know where and how to access support and are encouraged to do so if they need it.

2.3 Establish how the bereaved / affected family would like to communicate with the school and reach out to them.

A support plan for the affected family will be made at the Initial Information Sharing and Planning Meeting (IISPM) (see 3.9). It is advised that you make contact with the family after the IISPM has been held. A Child Death Review Specialist will be involved with the family at this point and will be visiting and supporting them.

The initial conversation with the affected family is likely to be extremely challenging. Designate a suitable member of staff to be the point of contact. This must be a member of the school Crisis Management Team, who can prioritise being available for the family, and who has relevant training and skills. Establish contact with the family as soon as you can and ensure the member of staff involved has support with this.

Before contacting the family:

- Establish the facts you already have from the police / LA.
- Clarify how the family prefers to communicate: home visit / phone call / letter / email / text. Some families will not want to be in contact with the school and you may have to communicate via a third party.
- Be aware of any religious and cultural beliefs that the family holds. See [Appendix D - Faith and Cultural Considerations around Death, Bereavement and Suicide](#).
- Speak with members of staff who knew the student: find out what they were good at and what people liked about them.

During the conversation:

- Use a calm voice and simple language.
- Extend sympathy - this is a difficult time and the pain and distress felt by all needs to be acknowledged.
- It's ok to show emotion - it shows you care.
- Maintain a sympathetic and supportive attitude throughout.
- Listen.
- Remember that people are in the first stages of grief. They are likely to be shocked and may appear numb, withdrawn, angry, very emotional and may even talk about bizarre or seemingly irrelevant things.
- Share what their child was good at, what people liked about them - family should know that their child was known and will be missed. Parents have reported that they like it when professionals talk about their child, for example, 'Tom always made everyone laugh'.
- Use the child's name throughout as you would if they were still alive (do not refer to them as 'the child' or 'the body').
- Remember you are unlikely to make the situation worse by what you say.
- If it feels appropriate to discuss funeral / memorial at this stage, ask about their plans and how they would like the school to be involved. If not, this information will need to be discussed at some point over the coming week (see 3.2).

If the LA / Police have informed you that the death was a suspected suicide:

- Seek permission from the family to refer to the death as a suspected suicide.
- If the family ask for advice, discuss the damaging effect of misinformation and the importance of being able to talk to students about suicide and its causes, which can help keep students safe.
- If the family does not want the death to be referred to as a suspected suicide, this needs to be respected. Referring to a death as a suicide without the family's consent can have an adverse effect on the grief of the bereaved and others affected. It also poses a possible litigation risk for the school.

If the death has been confirmed as a suicide by the Coroner, but the family does not want this disclosed:

- Continue to reach out sensitively and supportively to the family.
- Explain that students are already talking about the death as a suicide, and that talking openly about suicide to students as well as discussing how the death has

impacted them, the importance of seeking support and where to get help, can help to keep students safe.

- It is essential to respect the family's wishes: if the family wants the death explained as accidental or unexplained, the organisation can simply state that the family has requested that details are not shared. Staff can still take the opportunity to talk about suicidal thoughts and feelings without referring to the death being by suicide.

In cases of suicide, it is very common for families to blame the school, especially if there was bullying involved. Understandably, parents / carers are searching for reasons why their child has died. This can be very painful and upsetting for school leaders and staff. It is essential to remember that suicide is very complex and can never be attributed to a single cause. Leading the response to a suicide, especially when the school has been blamed, is exceptionally stressful. See [Appendix E - How to Respond to Parents / Carers When the School or College feels 'Blamed' for an Unexpected Death](#) for more support if you are facing this challenge.

It can take many months for an inquest to be held and in many cases unexplained deaths are not given a verdict of suicide.

2.4. Inform your Chair of Governors.

Contact your Chair of Governors and ask them to inform the rest of the Governing Body. Some Governors will be parents / carers of students in the school, and will need to be informed as a Governor before they are contacted as a parent / carer.

2.5 Find a welcoming, safe space for supporting students in the school. Make sure everyone knows this is available.

Students greatly benefit from having a dedicated safe place to go to be quiet or express emotion when they feel overwhelmed. Following an unexpected death, it is especially important to ensure that a suitable space is available and that all students are aware of how to access it.

Ensure all students know this is available; keep in mind that those most affected may not be obvious. For example, a young person who had a crush on the person who has died may be deeply affected but not identifiable by staff as high risk.

Use existing resources in school to create a comfortable space; provide post-it notes and paper / card to leave messages, write letters or draw, provide board games, allow students to listen to music, provide drinks, fruit, biscuits and tissues.

Ensure a member of staff is supervising the room at all times. Your Local Authority Critical Incident Team representative can assess risk if needed. Keep a record of who is using the room and make calls to parents / carers / arrange for students to be collected at the end of the day if you are worried about them.

[Appendix F - Suggested Activities for a Bereavement Support Room](#) includes more guidance around setting up a support room in school.

Some students may not wish to access the room even though they could greatly benefit from support. Ensure you have different support options available that can be accessed in different ways and are made widely known to all. Some may want to have the support of their peers, some may want to learn about how others have been able to cope with the news, some may wish to talk anonymously with a mental health professional for support.

Some staff may also be deeply affected by the news and benefit from having their own dedicated space, in addition to the staff room, to express grief or take some time out. If possible, provide an additional room for staff.

2.6 Talk to your staff. Trauma can cause confusion and feel frightening - consistent messages are crucial.

Before sharing the news with staff, ensure you have established the facts. Take great care with how you share information if the death was a suspected suicide: the term 'suicide' should not be used until it has been established with a good degree of certainty that the death was as a result of suicide, and the family have given permission for this information to be shared. It is safer to use the term 'unexpected death'.

The purpose of this meeting is to relay facts to staff, plan the schedule for the day, and provide information so that staff can give students the same consistent message. You need to be quite clear about what you can and cannot say. It is going to be most helpful to the child's family and friends if every member of staff is telling the same story and is making it quite clear why that story is being told. You may need to say, for example, "The child's father wants you to know that they died yesterday afternoon; until he has told us the opinion of the doctors, there isn't anything more that I can say about that. It is important that we respect their family's wishes about this."

It is generally the Headteacher who leads this meeting, and you may need to meet with staff in two or more separate groups in order to facilitate supervision of students. Remember to inform all staff, including support staff, visiting teachers and peripatetic staff. If the school is very large, the SLT may need to inform other members of staff in groups. In this case, consider where the best relationships are e.g., subject heads may know their staff better than year heads. If a member of staff is known to be recently bereaved or likely to be particularly affected by the news, inform them individually if that is possible. Remember to make contact with staff who are absent or on leave.

Take a trauma informed approach to this initial meeting; staff may be in shock. Provide clear, concise information, provide drinks and tissues, recognise how hard it is for everyone, and ensure staff feel supported. LA staff can be present at this meeting and give a brief input about the support they can offer the school.

See [Appendix G - Suggested Agenda for the Initial Staff Meeting](#)

In this meeting, you will be asking staff to share the news with their students. Best practice is to share the news of an unexpected death with students in small groups such as tutor / form groups and not in a large assembly. This supports students to feel more comfortable expressing their grief, allows for conversation with peers, and makes it easier to identify students who need support. Offer support with this task for anyone who needs it e.g., new staff, those who do not feel emotionally connected to their classes, and those who are very upset by the news. School staff will also be grieving, whilst trying their best to offer support to students and their parents / carers; thank staff for their support, and offer the option of not being involved with this task if they feel this will put their own wellbeing at risk.

Provide staff with the following handouts:

Appendix H - Supporting grieving children & young people in Education (Winston's Wish)

Appendix I - Talking about Death and Dying with students (Winston's Wish)

Appendix J - How to Talk about Suicide with Young People (Headspace) (use only when the death was a suicide / suspected suicide). If the family has not given permission for the cause of death to be shared, ensure staff know this and are aware of how to respond to students' questions - **Appendix L** has more guidance around this.

Appendix K - Sources of Support for Staff

Appendix L - Informing students about the unexpected death of a student

If a teacher is particularly upset or feels unable to cope, (which could be for any number of reasons), make sure that they are offered support and that their class is covered.

If the school has a religious affiliation, it is important to include clergy who are on staff in any communications and outreach efforts to support the school community.

2.7 Talk to your students in small groups.

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

Friends closest to the student (and any other students identified as vulnerable) should be informed individually, or in small groups, by an appropriate member of staff and provided with immediate support; use **appendix L - Informing Students about the Unexpected Death of a Student** as a guide and consider making arrangements for them to be collected by their parents / carers if they feel this would be helpful. No students affected by the news should be allowed to leave the school unaccompanied, unless by direct arrangement with parents / carers.

Students need to be with people they know and trust, so it is better that teachers and other school staff break the news and provide support for the students in their tutor / form / class groups. Use **Appendix L - Informing Students about the Unexpected Death of a Student** (this includes info on how to respond to questions if the death cannot be referred to as a suicide).

Students with additional needs will need to be informed and supported by a member of staff who knows them well; they may express grief in different ways and may need tailored help in understanding what death means.

The resources below provide additional information on how to support children and young people with additional needs following an unexpected death:

- **Appendix M - Supporting Bereaved Children and Young People with Special Education Needs** has useful information from Child Bereavement UK about how to explain death to children and young people with SEN.
- The MENCAP website
- <https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/wellbeing/dealing-bereavement> has easy read guides and a free GriefChat service where you can talk with a trained bereavement counsellor.
- The National Autistic Society

- <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/mental-health/bereavement> has information on how grief might impact children and young people with neurodevelopmental conditions and how to support them.

2.8 Inform parents / carers about the death.

Giving parents / carers immediate and accurate information about the school's response to the death is supportive of students and their families. It also protects the setting in a number of ways:

- limits misinformation and distress
- reduces the number of enquiries
- encourages supportive actions and attitudes
- promotes communication with the school about wellbeing concerns
- gives parents / carers confidence in the school's response

Inform most parents / carers by letter and make phone calls to parents / carers of close friends of the deceased / more vulnerable students.

Parents / carers need to know:

- In brief what has happened (include pertinent facts without going into detail)
- What support the school is putting in place
- Where to access further support for themselves and their child(ren)

For letter templates see [Appendix N - Letter Templates for Informing Parents and Carers about an Unexpected Death](#) (includes templates for 1 and 2 weeks on).

Parents / carers may appreciate additional information around talking to their children about death and bereavement and how to support them. Winston's Wish have resources for parents / carers in several languages here:

www.winstonswish.org.uk/supporting-you/bereavement-information-other-languages.

If relevant, you may also find it helpful to share [Appendix O - Suicide in Schools. Information for Parents and Carers](#).

Many parents / carers will be supportive, but some can place blame on the school which can be especially upsetting for staff. See [Appendix E - How to Respond to Parents/Carers When the School or College feels 'Blamed' for an Unexpected Death](#) for more support if you are facing this challenge.

2.9 Inform the wider community about the death.

The Local Authority will support you with identifying and contacting the wider community and connected schools. Contact should be made with any schools that could be affected by the news of the death. Information relating to an unexpected death spreads quickly via social media / word of mouth and it is safer to overestimate the reach of the news than to underestimate it. Ensure contact is made with the Headteacher at any schools attended by siblings / known close friends, any feeder primary schools, and all secondary schools in the local area.

Ensure all adults who will have contact with students in the following 24 hours are briefed. This includes regular bus drivers, sports coaches, canteen staff, school support staff, out of school hours' care staff and tutors.

2.10 The death of a young person can often attract media attention. Assign one member of the school Crisis Management Team to be responsible for media liaison.

Managing press relations is very important following an unexpected death. The media has a dual role in providing both public information and news, so it is vital that the media interface is handled effectively. Schools should liaise with the Council's Corporate Communications Team for advice and support; they will provide a single point of contact who will be able to guide you through the process. You may wish to direct all media approaches through your contact rather than responding directly to telephone calls.

Ensure the member of the school Crisis Management Team responsible for media liaison is provided with **Appendix P: A Guide to Dealing with the Media Following an Unexpected Death** which includes a sample media statement, frequently asked questions, and some do's and don'ts for dealing with the press. Make sure all staff know who the media contact is, and request that any inquiries be directed to that person.

There are clear guidelines for reporting death, and particular care should be given when reporting suicides in order to minimise the risk of contagion. Ensure the dedicated member of staff is aware of responsible reporting guidelines; Samaritans has a useful [10 point summary](#) here:

www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/media-guidelines/10-top-tips-reporting-suicide and **Appendix Q - Suicide Language Guidelines** explains what language to use and why. It is important to use any communications shared in the aftermath of an unexpected death as an opportunity to encourage help seeking behaviour and support any students who may be affected. All information and communications shared, including responses to media enquiries, should include sources of support. For additional support with handling the media in the aftermath of a suspected suicide, you can email Samaritans' Media Advice team on: mediaadvice@samaritans.org

There is likely to be unwanted media attention around the school gates and students may be approached for comment. Ask students to avoid press and direct any enquiries to the dedicated member of staff. If possible, ask a member of staff to be available outside the school grounds to politely but firmly request journalists not approach students, and direct enquiries to the dedicated member of staff instead.

Journalists must not continue to question, contact or photograph people once they have been asked to stop. If you clearly request that a journalist stops their activities, the Editors' Code requires them to do so unless there is specific and adequate public interest to justify a decision to carry on.

The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) has a 24-hour emergency harassment helpline if you are being bothered by a journalist. During office hours contact 0300 123 22 20 or for out of hours contact 07799 903 929. There is more advice available on the IPSO website: <https://www.ipso.co.uk/harassment/>

Take note of when articles will be published and be prepared to offer students / staff additional emotional support on this day; seeing the headlines and photos can be especially upsetting.

2.11 You may be asked to attend an information sharing meeting within 24 hours.

The death of a child triggers a multi-agency response with a clear process of information sharing, planning and learning meetings. The Initial Information Sharing and Planning Meeting (IISPM), usually happens on the same / next working day following a death. The Headteacher and other members of Senior Staff may be invited. See **3.09** for more information about this process, the additional meetings that you may be asked to attend, and how to prepare.

3. The first week

3.1 Restore your setting to its regular routine - but continue to be aware of issues that may evolve.

Maintaining an appropriate compassionate response, whilst supporting students to continue with normal life and keep the school running is an important contribution to the recovery of all affected members in the school community. Routine is very important at a time of tragedy; it provides a sense of security and structure which is comforting for many students and staff.

It is sometimes the case that the first day following an incident is quite calm with a sense of numbness and quietness in the school as people may be in shock. Day 2 may be a day when more support is needed as the news begins to sink in and people begin to feel the reality and pain of the loss.

You may wish to consult students about what to do if there is an event scheduled such as a trip, concert, or match. This should reduce the likelihood of students being angry later on as a result of any school action or in-action.

3.2 Discuss funeral and memorial with your school Crisis Management Team and the LA, keeping the family's wishes in mind.

The school Crisis Management Team Member responsible for family contact should sensitively discuss memorial and funeral plans with the affected family, with regard for different religious traditions and faiths. Ask if the family would like staff and students to attend the funeral, ask about their wishes regarding memorial, and keep them informed of any spontaneous memorials set up by students.

Funeral

Ideally, attendance at the funeral should be limited to close friends and staff. In all cases, the Head or Deputy Headteacher should request to attend the funeral. It is important to be respectful of the wishes of the family with regards to staff and student attendance. Although students may want to attend, the family may wish for a small, private funeral for family members only. The staff member liaising with the family should clarify this and communicate this to the school community.

If the family gives permission for students to attend, ensure that parent / carer permission has been obtained to leave school to attend the service and follow regular protocols for dismissing students.

Services can be extremely upsetting for young people. Encourage parents / carers whose children express an interest in attending the funeral to attend with them to provide emotional support and monitor their children's response. If possible, the school should coordinate with the family and funeral director to arrange for mental health professionals to attend the service.

It is strongly advised not to hold funeral and memorial services on school grounds. Using a room or an area of the school for a funeral service can inextricably connect that space to the death, making it difficult for students to return there for regular classes or activities.

It is also strongly advised that the service be held outside of school hours. If the family does hold the service during school hours, keep the setting open and do not use school buses to transport students to and from the service.

Memorial

Following any death, there is a natural wish to pay tribute to the person who has died. Regardless of the cause, settings should try to treat all deaths in the same way; having one approach for memorialising a student who died of cancer or in a car accident and a different approach for a student who died by suicide reinforces stigma and may affect the student's family and friends. Remember that whatever policy or precedent the school sets at this time may need to apply to all future deaths.

Consult with the family and close friends and handle memorials with great care and sensitivity in order to work out a meaningful and safe way of acknowledging the loss. In the case of suicide, it is vital that the death is not inadvertently glamorised or romanticised, which can increase the risk of contagion. Vulnerable people may be at risk of interpreting any memorial or recognition as giving positive attention to suicide and presenting suicide as a viable choice for dealing with problems.

The Bereavement Support Room can be used for reflective activities that involve smaller groups of students, and students can be offered the chance to write messages or cards to be put up on a temporary display or in a memorial book. Messages should be monitored by a member of staff and set up in an area that may be avoided by those who don't wish to participate (e.g., not in the canteen or at the front entrance). Be vigilant to any inappropriate messages, (e.g. hostile or inflammatory), these should be removed and followed up on as they may indicate students who are themselves at risk.

Students may come to school wearing T-shirts or badges bearing photographs of the deceased student. Although these items may be comforting to some students, they may be quite upsetting to others. If students arrive wearing such items, it is recommended that they be allowed to wear the items only for that day, and that staff gently explain the rationale. Some settings have found a middle ground, for

example, by allowing students to wear wristbands with positive messages to encourage help seeking in times of need.

It is not unusual for students to create a spontaneous memorial by leaving flowers, cards, poems, pictures, stuffed animals, or other items in a place closely associated with the student, such as his or her locker or classroom seat, or at the site where the student died. A combination of time limits and straightforward communication regarding the memorials can help to restore equilibrium.

Temporary memorials should not be placed at the location of the death, or in a place that is very public. Everyone should feel able to visit the memorial site by choice and not have to see it if they do not wish to. Spontaneous memorials should also be monitored by a member of staff for messages of concern or inappropriate items or comments.

Deciding when to remove the memorial is always difficult, as it carries the risk of evoking a negative reaction. One way to mitigate this risk is for a member of the school Crisis Management Team to discuss the removal of items in the memorial with close friends of the person who has died, before the flowers, mementos and messages fade or become damaged. These can be gathered and sent to the family. To encourage a healthy grieving process, carefully remove memorials soon after the funeral or within 2 weeks and let the bereaved family know you are doing so. Any further tributes should then be taken down at the end of each day. Find a way to let the school community know that the messages are going to the family so that people do not think they were disrespectfully removed. For example, post a statement near the memorial on the day it will be taken down.

Great care should be taken if the community wishes to establish a permanent memorial. While there is no research to suggest that permanent memorials create a risk of contagion, they can be upsetting reminders to bereaved students. Whenever possible, it is recommended they be established off school grounds. Bear in mind that once a setting plants a tree, puts up a plaque, install's a park bench, or establishes a named scholarship for one deceased student, it should be prepared to do so for others, which can become quite difficult to sustain over time.

Social Media

It is very common for RIP pages to be set up following the death of a student. These can be a helpful place to share memories and support one another. Families have found that it can be a way of keeping in touch with the deceased's friends. Most of these are established by a friend and are unmoderated, which makes them very difficult to manage. If possible, a member of the school Crisis Management Team should speak directly with the student(s) who set up the site and offer support with reviewing and moderating any material posted to the site. Provide details of where students can seek help both in and out of school and ask the students to share this information on the site. Reading posts and comments about the death can take its toll on the emotional health and wellbeing of students, and staff should check in regularly with the student(s) involved and continue to offer support.

Some settings have found it helpful to set up their own online book of remembrance, overseen by a member of the school Crisis Management Team. Online memorials

should also be time-limited and include information around where to access support. Keep a printed copy of the memorial page after it has been taken down for your records. A copy can also be shared with the family.

3.3 Consider the places the student normally spent time, as well as the place of death. Discuss how this might affect students with your school Crisis Management Team.

The emptiness of the deceased student's chair can be a particularly distressing symbol for students, and it is advisable to re-arrange seating to create a new environment. Speak with your Educational Psychologist or other Local Authority Critical Incident Team representative about when to do this, and forewarn students that this is going to happen.

There may be other locations that remind students of the deceased, such as the bus they usually took, their room (if in a boarding school), and the place of death. Be especially vigilant of students in these areas, monitor wellbeing where possible and continue to provide information around how to access support.

Once permission has been obtained to share the student's name, ensure registers and lists are amended, as it can be upsetting for students to hear the name being read aloud and followed by silence.

3.4 Collect all the belongings of the deceased for the police and family - ensure that you and your staff are supported to do this as this can be a difficult task.

The protection of a student's belongings is an important act of respect for a grieving family. It is also critical to the work that police will undertake. When other students take / distribute these belongings, they may unwittingly cause distress for the deceased student's parents / carers and compromise police work. It is vital this does not happen. Any item can assume a precious status for family members and be significant to the work of police or the coroner.

Once the police give you their approval, a member of the school Crisis Management Team should empty the student's locker or drawer. This should only be done when students are not present. These items should be kept together with the student's other belongings. An inventory should be made of these items and they should be stored securely in the school until they are collected by or delivered to the family. Bereaved parents / carers often find it helpful to visit the school at a later date. This offers the school an opportunity to return the student's personal belongings and / or school work to the family. It may be an idea to put them in a 'memory folder' or 'memory box'.

3.5 Review upcoming curriculum themes - is there anything with the potential to re-traumatise?

Ask all staff to carefully consider the upcoming work they have planned for their students. Anything symbolic of death has the potential to re-traumatise students and should be avoided in the months following a death. Consider adapting any dark curriculum themes.

Remember that grief reactions can be triggered long after a bereavement and staff should be aware that behaviour may be affected for some time.

3.6 Look for opportunities to promote healthy grieving and emotional wellbeing within the curriculum.

Ask staff to use **Appendix H - Supporting grieving children & young people in Education (Winston's Wish)** as a guide. Even for seemingly unrelated subjects, staff can still acknowledge and validate the experience that students are going through, and regular check-ins / words of recognition and support, will be helpful and positive.

The Young Minds video - <https://youtu.be/o-7c74-pUlk> - features young people talking about bereavement, and can be helpful in normalising a wide range of reactions towards grief.

Child Bereavement UK has an extensive list of books and resources relating to grief and bereavement for children and young people, as well as books for staff here: <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/pages/category/books-resources>

If possible, ensure your library has a selection of age-appropriate books, and provide books for staff in communal areas. Make sure staff and students know these are available.

If the death was a suspected suicide, school communities can find it uncomfortable to talk about suicide at all without permission. Sensitively discussing suicide as a general topic is recommended and does not breach confidentiality. While schools may need to avoid confirming whether a particular student died by suicide, and should always avoid talking about methods, appropriate conversations about suicide as a general topic, with a focus on taking care of your mental health, particularly if there is speculation among students about suicide, is beneficial.

Suicide produces many painful and confusing emotions in those that knew the deceased, including guilt, which can be especially painful. Both students and staff will need support to manage these emotions and understand that they are not to blame. The Educational Psychology Service can support you with this. Addressing the topic of suicide in a responsible way plays a key part in the prevention of further suicides.

In contrast to contagion, the Papageno effect is the positive influence that responsibly reporting on suicide and presenting non-suicide alternatives to crises can have on behaviour. Settings should focus on raising awareness of the emotional support available and encouraging students to take advantage of such assistance should they need it. All communal spaces and classrooms should have posters displaying signposting to sources of support.

3.7 Continue to identify and support your vulnerable students with support from the LA. Review attendance.

Continue to follow up all absences from school as low attendance can signal increased risk.

Be vigilant to students experiencing negative life events as acquaintances can be more at risk than close friends and are sometimes missed. Use existing systems, such as CPOMS, to record any concerns.

3.8 Review the opportunities for students to access support with Emotional and Mental Health and build capacity where needed e.g., additional counselling resource, activities

Convene the school Crisis Management Team to review how students can access Emotional and Mental Health support. Invite your Educational Psychologist ERYC Safeguarding representative to be part of this discussion. Plan how best to raise awareness of existing support available (such as Text your School Nurse/ the Health Drop-ins) and consider adding additional avenues for reaching out, such as a dedicated email / postbox for students to share concerns.

Work with IT support to review access to Emotional and Mental Health support online. Review the support available on your school website. It is recommended that all schools and colleges download R;pple on their laptops and computers. R;pple is a browser extension (free to all education settings) which provides support when a person searches for harmful keywords or phrases relating to self-harm or suicide.

[Allsorts Youth Project](#) listens to, connects and supports children and young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or exploring their sexual orientation and / or gender identity (LGBT+). Allsorts provide valuable support for LGBT+ students both in and out of school. Consider enlisting the support of Allsorts, especially if the student who died was LGBT+.

Allsorts Youth Project

Tel: 01273 721100 / Email: info@allsortsyouth.org.uk

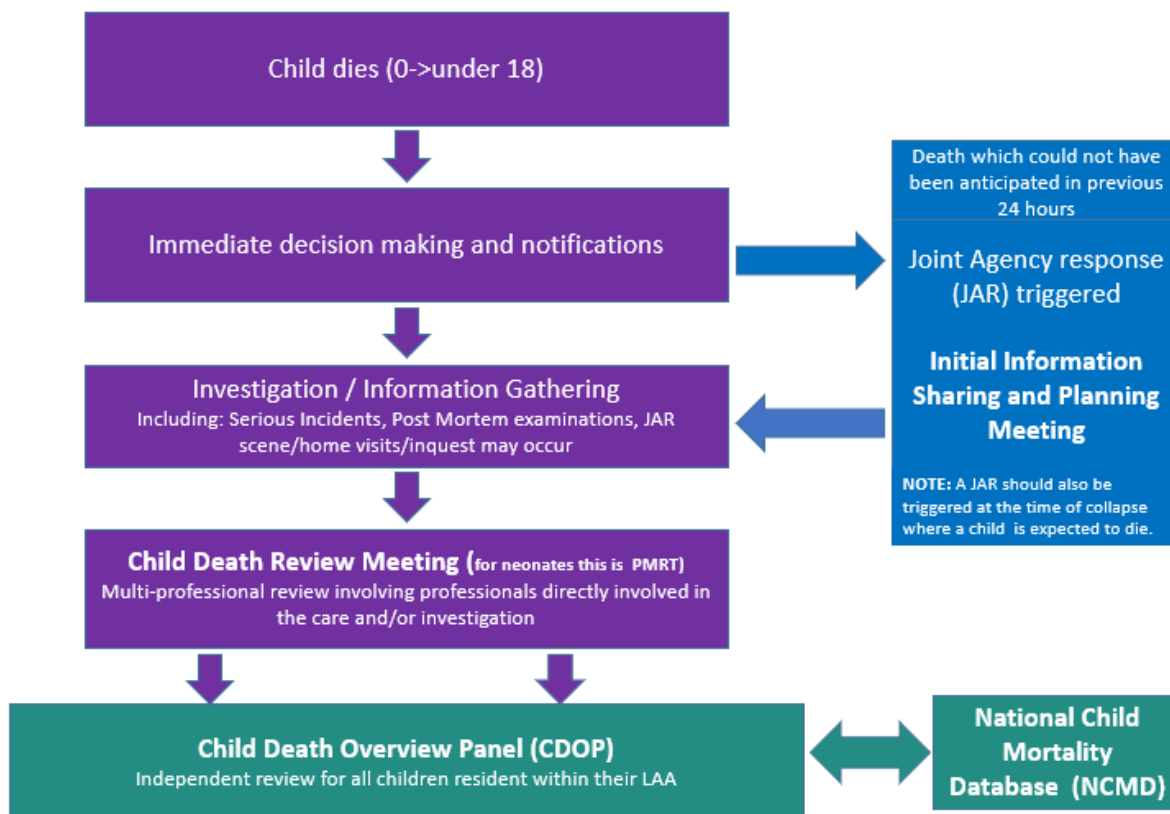
For further support responding to a suspected suicide, contact The Samaritans. The Samaritans' 'Step by Step' service is available to schools and colleges in the UK. Postvention Advisors are able to offer support in the following ways: providing communications and talks to staff, parents/carers and students, advice on how to handle the media, advice on responding to social media, and support with memorials and anniversaries.

Tel: 0808 168 2528 / E-mail: stepbystep@samaritans.org

3.9 Attend relevant information sharing meetings with key agencies - it may be useful to have another member of the school Crisis Management Team to attend with you.

There is an Unexpected Child Death Protocol which involves a Joint Agency Response. This will be put into action as soon as the news of the death has been shared by Police or Health colleagues through the Front Door For Families.

The following chart illustrates the full process of a child death review, and the text below clarifies which meetings school staff may be asked to attend and contribute to:



You are likely to be called to attend the Initial Information Sharing and Planning Meeting (IISPM). A member of the admin team from Children’s Services will contact the school by generic email / phone. The IISPM:

- Usually takes place on the same day (where possible)
- Will inform actions for the school to take
- Is a key part of the joint agency response
- Usually takes place during normal working hours to ensure all relevant professionals can attend
- Involves the lead health professional, lead police investigator, Child Death Review specialist nurse, the primary care team and any other relevant professionals who knew the child or family. The coroner’s officer may be invited to this meeting
- Will be convened and chaired and minuted by Children’s Services
- Will review all of the information available at this stage and identify what further investigations/actions are required and consider the ongoing support needs of the family
- Will consider and plan for those around the young person who may be in need of support and intervention

These meetings can be distressing. You may know the child, unlike other professionals in the meeting, and the content can feel very clinical. It is recommended you attend with another senior member of staff, preferably one who knew the child. Ask which parts of the

meeting are necessary for you to attend; it is not essential for school staff to be present for the health information / police investigation elements.

How to prepare for the IISPM:

- Gather as much soft intelligence about the child, there is never too much information you can give
- Bring notes on:
 - Any information about the family: concerns raised by parents / carers, any past issues, concerns about parent / carer health
 - Information on their learning and school attendance - has there been any recent dips or challenges?
 - Information on how they coped during Covid19
 - Information about their wider family including siblings
 - Information about friendship groups, including names of friends
- Factor in some time afterwards to take a walk/have a coffee / call family before returning to school

For more detail on how the Joint Agency Response works see [Appendix R - What is a Joint Agency Response?](#)

If the death was a suspected suicide, you will be supported by the Local Authority to mitigate the risk of contagion. [Appendix S - Suicide Contagion \(Headspace\)](#) has more information on what this means, and [Appendix C - Circles of Vulnerability](#) can be a useful starting point for considering who might be at risk.

As the Child Death Review Process progresses you may also be asked to complete an eCDOP (electronic child death overview panel) reporting form. The eCDOP reporting form will ask about the input your school had with the child and their family. If you require support to complete the eCDOP reporting form, who can assist you on the phone or via Microsoft Teams. You may also be asked to attend the Child Death Review Meeting which occurs 3-6 months after the child / young person has died. Please be aware that these meetings can last up to 2 hours. Once again, the Child Death Review Meeting can be emotionally challenging; take care of yourself and only attend the necessary parts.

Coroners Inquests

When someone dies suddenly, the circumstances are investigated to establish the cause of death. In England, this is done by a coroner, through an inquest. An inquest is a public court hearing to establish who has died, and how, when and where the death happened. It is possible students and staff who lived with or knew the deceased well be summoned to attend the inquest. This is a difficult and distressing time for those involved.

If you are invited to attend an inquest, you may find it helpful to watch some of the following video in advance to have an idea of what to expect:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XS4nzMFseNY>

This film seeks to recreate an inquest hearing where the family and witnesses are participating in the hearing remotely. The film explains the role of the Coroner and the purpose of an inquest and illustrates the procedure during a remote inquest hearing.

You can also contact Samaritans for emotional support before and after the inquest. You can ask for Samaritans to attend the court and be present to talk to for support.

Tel: 0808 168 2528 / E-mail: stepbystep@samaritans.org

The press has a right to attend inquests and report on anything that is said in a Coroner's Court, as long as they adhere to the Editors' Code.

3.10 Plan regular staff meetings, to ensure they are provided with up-to-date information and know where to access support for students and themselves.

Staff should meet regularly during this first week. This allows for regular debriefing, which ensures staff feel supported and up to date with relevant information. In turn, this helps create calm and restore order. Maintain a trauma informed approach, with clear and concise information, recognition of the challenges, and gratitude for their ongoing support. A sense of collegiality and shared responsibility can help protect the wellbeing of staff.

These first few meetings can be used to discuss:

- any concerns or observations which staff consider important
- any funeral plans, including parent/carer consent requirements
- the presence of additional personnel and their roles
- when staff can expect that a deceased student's name will be removed from the register (this is easier for staff to cope with if it is anticipated, rather than a surprise)
- any media involvement
- any new information / requirements
- the need to collect information for the documentation process
- the importance of monitoring their own wellbeing and the support available
- upcoming events or activities which might need to be altered or cancelled in view of the unexpected death. Consider all the roles that the deceased student would have been playing in the near future (e.g. sporting, academic or community roles). You do not need to decide how to manage the situation immediately, just to know what has to be planned.

Encourage staff to ask questions, and to immediately pass on names of students they are concerned about.

3.11 Monitor staff wellbeing

The member of the school Crisis Management Team responsible for staff wellbeing should speak with The Educational Psychology Service about the support available for staff. The good mental health of staff will assist the school in returning to regular routines and help make students feel well supported and cared for.

Expect to have an unpredictable emotional response from staff; the death of a child will impact people differently depending on a whole host of factors. Staff may be experiencing feelings of guilt and grief about the death, and some will be thinking of their own children, family members and friends, or past traumas.

Appendix K - Sources of Support for Staff is a useful starting point for considering the support available. Regular opportunities for them to debrief are important. Keep in mind that staff will differ in the type of support they prefer - some may wish to speak with someone they know, and others may find it challenging to speak with someone they already work with in a professional capacity. Provide practical support

for staff to manage their job wherever possible e.g., reducing the workload so that staff have some time to choose how they would like to take care of their wellbeing.

Ensure staff are regularly reminded of the support available for them, and that all new staff are informed when they start. Ensure support available for staff is printed and displayed in the staffroom and on the backs of the toilet doors.

As a leader, it is important to find someone to provide emotional support for you. As someone whose job it is to look after everyone else, it is not always easy to accept help, but it is essential to have space to show vulnerability when you need to. Support can be from whoever feels right, whether that be your partner, your faith leader, your EP, or a counsellor. Remember that the support listed in [Appendix K - Sources of Support for Staff](#) also applies to you.

3.12 Continue to update parents/carers and the wider school community

Provide regular, brief, updates to parents and carers. Include:

- any significant changes to the routine
- the availability of additional emotional health and wellbeing support
- any parent / carer workshops

A limited group of staff, students and parents / carers may also need to be kept informed of police processes, inquests and legal proceedings. These events have the potential to create high levels of stress.

3.13 Continue to document the school's actions

The member of the school Crisis Management Team responsible for administration should continue to clearly document all of the school's actions in response to the death. This information will be vital for the Critical Incident Review. Ensure any actions recorded are not lost.

4. The first month

4.1 Continue to monitor staff and student wellbeing - make sure everyone knows how to access support

By this time, students who are at increased risk will have been identified and should be receiving ongoing support and monitoring in partnership with mental health professionals and parents / carers. However, specific attention should be given to students whose social support networks change, who experience any family challenges (e.g., divorce / separation) or any other negative life events. Although at-risk students will have been identified in the weeks following the death, other students may become vulnerable at a later date.

Continue to normalise a range of reactions to bereavement; close friends can put pressure on each other by insisting on a particular way of "remembering" their friend and forgetting that people manage grief in very different ways. Staff can help these students by reinforcing (at appropriate times) that there is no right way to remember or grieve the loss of a friend and that they must be kind to each other and respect their differences.

Be alert for changes in behaviour - during the first few weeks after bereavement, a child may be withdrawn, feel abandoned, helpless, desperate, anxious, apathetic, angry, guilty and / or afraid, have sullen moods and lack concentration. These are common and are often acted out aggressively because they may be unable to express feelings verbally. Try to handle such symptoms patiently and calmly; do not seem surprised and do not get cross. Work, attention, and behaviour are likely to suffer through their emotional distress.

Continue to be mindful of the toll that an unexpected death can take on staff wellbeing. Look for ways to lighten the load of day-to-day administrative responsibilities to allow staff to focus on the wellbeing of themselves and their students.

4.2 Consider the possible impact of important school year events (school photographs, award nights, prom).

Following an unexpected death, you will be faced with some dilemmas to make around how to manage events or documents that represented the deceased student, including yearbooks, graduation nights, and award ceremonies.

Mark the school's calendar in advance with the anniversary date. Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students or staff, and they may need additional support. Discuss what to do with respect to events that the deceased student would have been part of e.g., award ceremonies, the prom, productions, how to manage exam results.

Regardless of the cause, all deaths should be treated in the same way. This is the guiding principle. If there is a history of dedicating a page of the yearbook, or making a tribute at graduation to students who have died, that policy is equally applicable to any death of a student. Ensure that final editorial decisions are made by a member of the school Crisis Management Team and that the bereaved family are always consulted.

If the death was a suicide, schools can and should celebrate the young person's achievements in the normal way without fear that they are sensationalising the suicide. The focus should be on mental health and / or suicide prevention. For example, underneath the student's picture in the yearbook it might say, "In your memory, we will work to erase the prejudice surrounding mental health problems and suicide."

You can contact the Educational Psychology Service to discuss this, if needed.

4.3 Gather information from your staff that is relevant for a critical incident review - staff may need support with this sensitive task

The school Crisis Management Team will need to conduct a critical incident review. The purpose of a review is to evaluate the processes and procedures employed by the school in response to a critical incident; that is, an event outside the normal range of experience of the people involved. During this review it is helpful to allow all staff an opportunity to contribute their views on how the school community has

managed its postvention responsibilities. The easiest way to collect candid staff opinion is to provide a written survey (which can be completed anonymously).

Ask staff to consider a number of issues and whether these could be improved:

- identification and support of at-risk students
- staff and student understanding about what to do when they have concerns about a young person's safety
- communication within the school
- communication with parents / carers
- support for staff
- communication with and support from the Local Authority and outside agencies
- the school culture before and after the death

A member of the school Crisis Management Team should collate the responses and provide them to all staff, as well as those participating in the critical incident review.

4.4 Conduct a critical incident review - staff may need support with this sensitive task

A critical incident review generates ideas on how to improve your school's emergency response and identifies what went well. Someone from the Local Authority will facilitate this task. A member of the school Crisis Management Team should provide a summary of documentation to date, and data from the staff survey. Critical incident reviews are most effective when all participants come prepared and have thought through their ideas and opinions. They need to feel safe to openly express their views and believe the school will use this opportunity to improve processes and acknowledge achievements.

4.5 Clearly communicate sources of support to parents/carers and consider offering information sessions from a mental health professional

e.g. school-based counsellor/pastoral lead, faith rep, MHST

A member of the school Crisis Management Team should consult with parents / carers around their needs and how they would like these to be addressed. This may vary greatly, depending on the nature of the death and the size of the school and community. Support could include:

- General information sessions on supportive parenting, recognising signs children may need support with their mental health, current research on building resilience, and understanding grief and loss
- Sessions to discuss the outcomes of the critical incident review
- Information sessions targeted at parents / carers of an identified group of at-risk students

If the student who died was LGBT+, some families may benefit from more specific sessions around how best to support their children's needs. Contact Allsorts for support with this. www.allsortsyouth.org.uk

4.5 Continue to document the school's actions - this can be useful for learning lessons and response planning, as well as record keeping.

In addition to keeping a record of the school's actions, capture any feedback from staff on what support has been helpful and what could be improved. Good practice

is to encourage feedback and learning from any support in response to an unexpected death. A member of the LA is likely to be in touch requesting feedback and it can be helpful to be prepared for this.

4.6 Review upcoming Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing curriculum themes - is there anything you can use to promote healthy grieving and emotional wellbeing? Is there anything with the potential to re-traumatise?

Continue to be cautious of including anything in the curriculum that has the potential to re-traumatise.

Focus on building resilience and coping skills; problem solving; decision making and help seeking skills. Mental health promotion in schools, when implemented effectively, can produce long-term benefits for young people, including emotional and social functioning and improved academic performance. Programmes adopting a whole school approach are the most successful. Brighton & Hove's PSHE Service can provide support to schools and colleges to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the PSHE education curriculum.

You may find it useful to contact the MHEW in Education team or Safeguarding:

Childrens.socalcare@eastriding.gov.uk

Samaritans and Winston's Wish have developed a wealth of free resources for schools which you may wish to use in your setting:

Samaritans DEAL (Developing Emotional Awareness and Listening)

DEAL includes lesson plans, activities, hand-outs, digital resources, teachers' notes and staff training materials. DEAL is designed to help develop resilience in young people.

DEAL resources can be found here: www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/schools/deal/

Winston's Wish PSHE Lessons

Free lesson plans and assembly content designed to help staff to talk about bereavement and loss with students, further their understanding and educate them on how best to help a grieving friend.

Winston's Wish resources can be found here: www.winstonswish.org/pshe-lessons/

NB following a suicide: programmes focussed directly on raising student awareness of suicide may appear desirable, but they are controversial. It is thought that they may carry the risk of increasing suicidal behaviour among young people through normalising it as a legitimate response to adolescent stress. Suicide awareness programmes aimed at school staff are more appropriate. Programmes, which might have unintended negative outcomes, should not be implemented unless there is a strong evidence base for their effectiveness.

4.7 Review wellbeing and attendance data

Young people face many challenges in their lives. Not being accepted for who they are and what they are can often cause difficulties. Students who feel different because of their sexuality, their gender, their ethnicity, their interests, their faith, their talents, their family, the way they look, etc., may experience difficulties in the school environment.

Use existing data or consider collecting data to inform a discussion around what is being done to support student wellbeing. For example, the Healthy Schools' Programme ['My Health, My School' survey tool](#) can be used to identify your setting's most vulnerable groups and get a sense of their collective wellbeing. Do they feel part of the community? Do they have opportunities to be heard? Do they know where to access support if they need it and do they feel able to?

If the death was a suspected suicide, a helpful exercise is to imagine what the day in the life of a student struggling with their mental health might feel like. How are they welcomed by staff at the school gates? Where can they go at break time if they feel helpless? How can they get support if they feel overwhelmed in class? Who can they go to if they are being bullied? Do staff help them feel like a valued member of the school community? This activity can be used to generate ideas for small but potentially incredibly meaningful adjustments to the school community, to make it safer.

See [Appendix T - Suicide in Children and Young People](#) for data from the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health (NCISH).

5. Longer term

5.1 Continue to monitor staff and student wellbeing - make sure everyone knows how to access support

Returning to normal routines does not mean that vigilance and awareness of student and staff wellbeing are lessened. This should continue for a number of months, or longer for some individuals.

Contact East Riding of Yorkshire Workplace Wellbeing [Vivup](#) for support to improve staff health and wellbeing, including free training, health checks and advice.

5.2 Continue to update parents / carers and the wider school community where this is needed

Giving parents / carers, staff and students regular and relevant communication is just as important in the long term as it is in the short term. Advice about anniversaries involving the deceased student (including birthdays, the date of death, the date of inquest), media coverage or any other forms of potential stress will continue to help protect the wellbeing of the community and reinforce a consistent and supportive approach.

If the death was by suicide, parents / carers of the deceased student may express an interest in holding an assembly or other event to address the student body and describe the intense pain the death has caused to their family in hopes that this will dissuade other students from attempting suicide.

While it is understandable that bereaved parents / carers would wish to prevent another death, schools are strongly advised to explain that both presenting this content and holding assemblies or other large events for students is not an effective approach to suicide prevention and may actually be risky. Students suffering from

depression or other mental health issues may hear the messaging very differently from the way it is intended, and they may be even more likely to act on their suicidal thoughts. In addition, students are very reluctant to speak in an assembly if they have questions or concerns. A more helpful option is to encourage parents/carers to meet with members of the school Crisis Management Team to share their reflections. These can then be used to inform training for staff and parents / carers.

5.3 Increase monitoring of school wellbeing and plan support for anniversaries, birthdays and other significant event

The anniversary of a person's death, the inquest, and events such as their birthday or school graduation, are often difficult times for friends and family and can take them back to their original levels of mourning. These dates serve as reminders that the person they were close to is no longer with them. Even for those coping well, events like these can bring up old feelings of grief, sadness and loss. They may also experience feelings of anxiety - about not being able to cope or about having to deal with these emotions again. Anniversaries and important events can also be a time of increased risk for vulnerable young people and may trigger suicidal thoughts or behaviours. Giving friends and family opportunities to mark these dates in meaningful ways can help the grieving process.

Support students to cope with these anniversaries and important events by:

- Letting them know it's normal to re-experience grief and sadness and significant times
- Remind them that things will get easier over time
- Suggest activities that make the young person feel good and remind them of the times they shared with the person
- Encourage them to contact supportive family members or friends rather than spending their days alone
- Remind them that there is no 'right' way to mark an anniversary. Help them find a way of coping that they feel comfortable with
- Help them connect with emotional and mental health support in school if they are feeling overwhelmed or unable to cope in the lead-up to the event
- Help them understand that the person who has died has not been forgotten

5.4 Implement the recommendations of the critical incident review - how can you apply those lessons learned?

Evidence clearly suggests many children who die unexpectedly have no identifiable risk factors. However, people's desire to see something positive emerge from a tragedy is very strong and it is vital to help the community achieve some of this sense of moving forward.

Convene the Critical Incident Team to begin to plan and implement any recommendations that were agreed to as part of the critical incident review. This might be carried out both as an internal exercise and in consultation with external organisations. Findings should be shared as widely as possible to inform best practice. Implementing the results of the critical incident review helps people appreciate the positive work that the school community has undertaken.

Anna Freud have developed an evidence-based classroom wellbeing toolkit which aims to build staff confidence in supporting students' mental health and wellbeing

through everyday practices. The resource, aimed at secondary school staff but relevant for primary and college staff, covers 5 strategy areas:

- building supportive relationships
- creating a classroom environment where all students feel they belong
- promoting good mental health
- responding to stress, low mood and anxiety
- preventing bullying, cyberbullying and sexual harassment.

It is not about asking teachers to be mental health professionals, but instead focuses on enhancing the quality of the classroom environment and staff-student relationships. The toolkit can be found here: <https://www.annafreud.org/media/16901/classroom-wellbeing-toolkit.pdf>

BIMM College in Brighton have developed a Suicide Safety Policy with a comprehensive action plan. If you would like to see a copy of the strategy contact ph.schools@brighton-hove.gov.uk

5.5 Consider offering further training for staff to enable them to respond to another event like this

For those directly involved, it may be too painful to participate in training related to unexpected death for some time. Allow staff time to process and recover before offering training that could trigger a grief response.

Winston's Wish offer free bereavement training for schools online here: <https://www.winstonswish.org/bereavement-training-courses-schools>

Zero Suicide Alliance offer free suicide awareness training here: <https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com/training>

Regular training will be provided to support school staff in this work by ERSCP Children's Services Education and Public Health.

5.6 Include any new policies or key learning in the staff induction process

Any key learning should be included in all new staff inductions. In particular, staff must be made familiar with the support processes for identified students, as well as the referral pathways and relationships with mental health professionals. Nominate a member of the school Crisis Management Team to whom new staff can direct queries regarding the school's response to unexpected death.

This guidance has been adapted from the resources below, with input from local Schools, Colleges, the Community & Voluntary Sector, and the Police:

- **Headspace's School Support Suicide Postvention Toolkit**
<https://headspace.org.au/assets/School-Support/Compressed-Postvention-Toolkit-May-2012-FA2-LR.pdf>
- **Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board. Multi-Agency Process to Assist Agencies Response to a Critical Incident Regarding a Child**
https://www.proceduresonline.com/barnsley/scb/files/multi_resp_crit_incident_ch.pdf

- **Responding to Critical Incidents. Guidelines for Schools. Department for Education and Skills**
https://www.cypsc.ie/_fileupload/Neps%20Critical%20Incidents%20Guidelines%20Schools.pdf
- **Samaritans Help When We Needed It Most**
https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Step_by_step_support_-_Help_when_you_needed_it_most_booklet_UK_EDS08UK_2020_WEB.pdf

Appendix A: Responding When a Death has Occurred During the school Holidays

If the death has occurred during the school holidays most of the guidance will still be relevant, particularly when the new term begins, but there will be additional complexities around sharing the news. Work with your Local Authority to share the news on a need-to-know basis.

The Child Death Review Process will remain exactly the same.

Working with the press

- Contact the Council's Corporate Communications Team and for support to ensure that any news articles signpost to the school's website.
- Write an announcement (see [Appendix O - A Guide to Dealing with the Media Following an Unexpected Death](#) for an example) and be ready to upload this onto your school website as soon as any news articles are published. Ensure sources of support (e.g., those included in [Appendix N - Letter Templates for Informing Parents and Carers about an Unexpected Death](#)) are also included.

School Crisis Management Team

- The school Crisis Management Team outlined in 2.1 will likely consist of a smaller group of key senior staff and may need to meet online.

Contacting Family

- Reach out to the affected family in the same way that you would if the death had happened during term time - see 2.3.

Contacting Governors

- Contact your Chair of Governors same way that you would if the death had happened during term time - see 2.4.

Contacting Staff

- Contact key staff (such as their tutor and class teachers) individually via email or phone call.
- All other staff should be contacted via email.
- Signpost staff to sources of support: see [Appendix K - Sources of Support for Staff](#).
- Factor in time to meet with all staff on the first day back, ideally on an Inset Day when students are not present. This will allow you to share the news with anyone who has not yet read the email, discuss how to share concerns about vulnerable students, and share the support available for students as outlined in 2.6.

Contacting Students

- Although many students will have heard the news, many will not have, and it is not necessary to contact all students and their parents / carers before term starts. Instead ask all staff to share the news with small groups, as outlined in the guidance in 2.7, on the first day back at school / college.

Contacting parents / carers

- Contact parents / carers of students who were close to the child who has died, to inform them during the school holidays. It is likely that they already know but this will allow you to signpost to sources of support. Your Local Authority can support you with this.
- Inform all other parents / carers via letter on the first day back - see 2.8.

Supporting students and staff

- When students and staff return to school use the guidance to support them as you would if the death had occurred during term time. Grief reactions can be triggered long after an event, and the bereavement support room, curriculum considerations, additional staff support etc. may all still be very much needed.

Appendix B: Sample Agenda for First Meeting of school Crisis Management Team

Unexpected Death School Crisis Management Team Meeting

[Date], [Time]
[Location]

Invite your school's Educational Psychologist to attend this meeting.

- Share full details of the event.
- Agree on the facts.
 - These will need to be relayed in a clear, appropriate and consistent manner by all staff.
- Discuss what agencies have been contacted and whether there are additional ones that that should be informed.
- Agree which phone line is to be kept open for outgoing and incoming emergency calls.
- Identify the School's Crisis Management Team Lead Roles and share main responsibilities.
 - **See 2.1 in guidance.**
- Plan procedures for the day and discuss issues relating to school routine, including school closure.
 - Remember it is important to maintain a normal routine when at all possible. It is recommended that the school timetable runs as normal. This will provide a sense of safety and structure which is comforting for many students. Teachers should give students the opportunity to talk about what has happened and temporarily shelve all academic activities if necessary.
 - You may wish to consult students about what to do if there is an event scheduled such as a trip, concert, match. This should reduce the likelihood of students being angry later on as a result of any action or in-action.
 - Consider lunch and break times - is extra staffing required?
- Discuss how to identify vulnerable students.
 - **See 2.2 in guidance.**
- Discuss how contact will be made with the bereaved family.
 - **See 2.3 in guidance.**
- Discuss how to break the news to close friends and who should do this (remember that they must always be told separately).
- Discuss how to break the news to the rest of the students.
 - **See 2.6 in guidance.**

- If there are students of various nationalities and religions in the school, this needs to be taken into consideration in organising prayer services, attendance at the funeral etc. Parents of different religious or national groups may need to be consulted. See [Appendix D - Faith and Cultural Considerations around Death and Bereavement](#)
- Plan a whole staff briefing (including ancillary staff).
 - This may need to be done in two groups depending on the arrangements for the supervision of students
- Agree the text of a letter to be sent to parents
 - See [Appendix N - Letter Template for Informing Parents and Carers about an Unexpected Death](#)
- Discuss how to deal with the media.
 - Prepare a media statement and place it on the school website, if appropriate. This can be emailed to media representatives who make contact with the school. It may also be used if an interview is requested.
 - See 2.10 in guidance.
- Decide which room(s) will be available to external agencies.
- Decide which room(s) should be made available for students.
 - This is a place that students can go if they are having difficulty remaining composed in the classroom.
 - See 2.4 in guidance.
- Decide if a room should be set up for staff.
- Summary of agreed actions.
- Discuss and agree on frequency of meetings, including a follow up staff meeting at the end of the day.
 - This gives an opportunity for the Team Lead to update staff on any developments. It also allows time for preparation for the following day. Lastly, it gives staff a chance to share their experience and to wind down after the day.

Appendix C: Circles of Vulnerability

The Circles of Vulnerability Model is a **systematic approach to identifying vulnerable groups and communities who are most at risk of suicide contagion** and is featured in national guidance 'Identifying and Responding to Suicide Clusters and Contagion'.

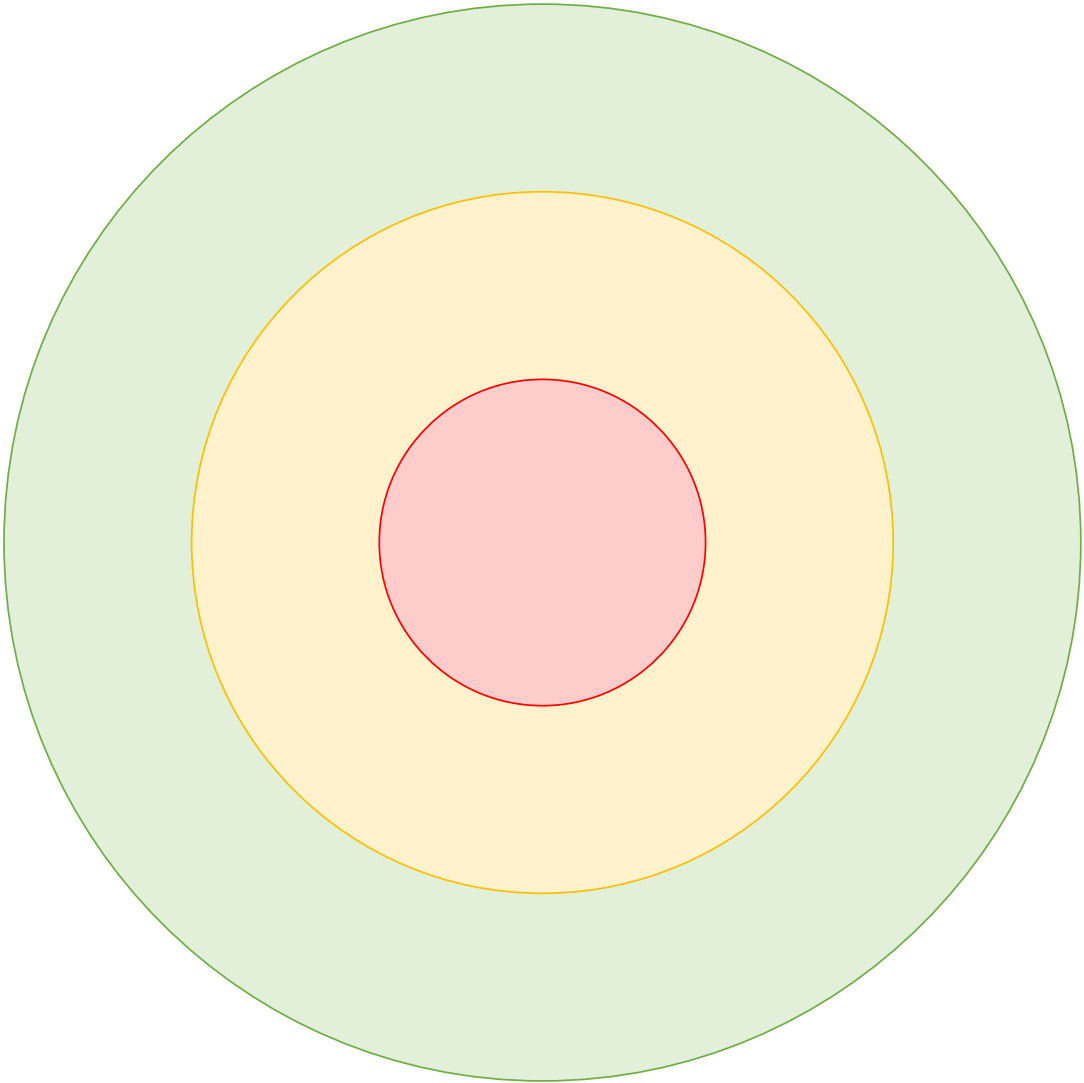
Research shows the people more vulnerable to increased risk of suicidal feelings and attempts after a suspected suicide are those:

- who have a **geographical connection** to the deceased (e.g., close to the place of death, neighbours, in the same classes, impacted by extensive or substantial media coverage, etc.)
- with **social proximity** (e.g., close family or friends, romantic partners, attend same clubs, societies, faith group etc. anyone expressing guilt about 'messages' that they were given by the deceased, that they did not act on or share), include those with **digital proximity** (e.g., through online social channels)
- with **psychological proximity** (e.g., those that identify with the student in some way, same problems, shared identities or likes)
- with physical health problems, mental health problems, a history of self-harm, previous suicidal ideation, excessive alcohol or drug use and those previously bereaved.

Place individuals within each circle accordingly

Within each circle, colour code (**green**: low risk, **yellow**: medium risk, **red**: high risk) according to the following criteria and degree of concern.

- Directly involved
- Witnesses
- At greatest risk as part of incident
- Siblings / relations
- Close friendships
- Any perceived culpability / responsibility
- Being blamed / scapegoated
- Displaying emotional distress
- Previous bereavement/trauma
- Pre-existing EBD / mental health issues
- Pre-existing home instability / stress
- Learning difficulties, Culture and/or language issues



Appendix D: Faith and cultural considerations in bereavement

It's important to be aware of and sensitive to the bereavement rituals and beliefs of faith and cultural groups within the school community. Some information is given below to support this understanding, but there may be variations as to which rituals are followed by individual families.

Schools are advised to consult with groups represented in the school community to ensure sensitivity is shown to culture and traditions should a bereavement occur and to avoid any assumptions.

If attending a funeral, it's advisable to ask family members about any dress codes e.g. suitable colours, colours to avoid, whether heads should be covered, shoes taken off or whether men and women are expected to sit separately.

This section in particular is subject to change and development following feedback from community groups.

BUDDHISM

Buddhists believe in rebirth and that when they die they will be reborn again. The goal is to escape the cycle of death and rebirth and attain nirvana or a state of perfect peace. There are lots of different types of Buddhism and many different ways of dealing with death.

The dying person may ask a monk or nun in their particular Buddhist tradition to help them make the transition from life to death as peaceful as possible.

Buddhists believe that a person's state of mind as they die is very important so they can find a happy state of rebirth when they pass away. Before and at the moment of death and for a period after death, the monk, nun or spiritual friends may chant from the Buddhist scriptures.

Buddhists believe the spirit leaves the body immediately but may linger in an in between state near the body. In this case it is important the body is treated with respect so that the spirit can continue its journey to a happy state. The time it is believed to take for the spirit to be reborn can vary depending on the type of Buddhism practised.

Because there are so many different types of Buddhist funeral traditions vary. Funerals will usually consist of a simple service held at the crematorium chapel. The coffin may be surrounded by objects significant to the person who has died. Monks may come with the family to the funeral and scriptures may be chanted.

The person may either be cremated or buried depending on their tradition. There may be speeches and chants on the impermanence of life.

The grave may be visited by friends and family in remembrance of the person who has passed away. The importance of the gravesite will depend on the particular Buddhist tradition. Buddhists believe that it is just the physical body that lies in the grave because the person's spirit has been reborn.

Buddhists will often do things to wish for the happiness of the deceased person. For example: in Southeast Asia lay people give offerings to the monks in memory of the dead person.

CATHOLIC

Catholics believe that there is an afterlife and that once a person dies they will see God face to face. If a person has committed a grave offence and has not repented at the time of death, then that person would not enter into the full glory of heaven.

The sick and the elderly can receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick on a regular basis if they wish to. If they can't get to church on their own they will be taken there by other members of the church.

When a person is close to death the family or friends ask a priest to come and pray with the sick person and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is administered. This includes anointing with Holy Oils and the reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion.

After the person has passed away the priest comforts the family and helps them prepare the funeral arrangements.

The Catholic funeral rite is called the Order of Christian Funerals. Family and friends pray for the soul of the deceased person and ask God to receive their soul into his eternal glory. The Vigil of the Deceased (a prayer service) is held the night before the funeral.

On the day of the funeral a Requiem Mass for the deceased person is celebrated. This includes scripture, prayers and hymns. Family and friends are invited to take part in the service.

At the grave or place where the body has been entombed the Rite of Committal is celebrated. Family members and friends along with the priest pray once again for the deceased person as they commit the body or cremated remains to the final resting-place. The gravesite is also blessed.

Over the next year family members and friends often have Mass celebrated for the peace of the soul of the deceased person. On special occasions such as the deceased's birthday, Christmas or anniversary of the death, family and friends will often visit the grave. Flowers or other objects to remember the deceased are sometimes placed on the grave as a sign of respect.

PROTESTANT

Christians trust they will go to heaven to be with God once they have died and so in some respects a funeral is a time of joy, although also sadness, as the person will be missed by friends and loved ones.

The church minister may come and visit the person and their family to discuss any concerns and to help the person to prepare for their death. Depending on the form of Christianity (i.e. Anglican, Presbyterian etc.) and the particular church, there may be slightly different customs that will be followed.

The church minister will offer any comfort or assistance the family needs to help them cope with the death and to organise the funeral. Friends will often send their sympathies in the form of cards and / or flowers to the deceased's family.

A Christian may be either buried or cremated, depending on their preference. The ceremony will typically be held at the deceased person's church and conducted by the minister, but it could also be held at a funeral home.

The ceremony may involve hymns, readings and prayer by both the minister and the deceased's family and friends. The casket may be present in the room during the ceremony and carried out at the end by pallbearers - usually members of the deceased's immediate family. There is often the opportunity for people to view the deceased and to say their last goodbyes before the deceased is buried.

If the deceased has been cremated the ashes may be scattered. Otherwise, the ashes or body will be buried in a cemetery and marked with a gravestone to remember the deceased.

On special occasions such as the deceased's birthday, Christmas or anniversary of the death, family and friends may come and visit the grave. Often, flowers or other objects to remember the deceased will be placed on the grave as a sign of respect.

COPTIC CHRISTIAN

When someone dies, a member of the family washes the body of the deceased. Only rarely does the family ask a professional to do the job for them, a man for a man and a woman for a woman. Then the body is dressed in a shroud and the family goes to church to pray for the dead. The priest pays his condolences to the family and thanks everyone who takes part in the funeral service.

There is no rule specifying the day on which the deceased has to be buried. Each family buries their dead just as they wish. Three days after the burial the priests visit the family in their home to pray and water is poured on the floor throughout the flat.

Tradition has it that relatives visit the family to mourn for forty days. The mourning period can be very long: some widows wear black for the rest of their lives.

GREEK ORTHODOX

Followers of the Greek Orthodox religion believe in eternal life. Thus the church strongly emphasises a positive outcome in death – that the deceased is alive with God. While death is the separation of the soul (the spiritual dimension of each person) from the body (the physical dimension), the physical body will be reunited with the soul at the Last Judgment.

The Orthodox religion is practiced today much as it was practiced hundreds of years ago, and is highly ritualistic and symbolic. The coffin is taken home on the way to the funeral service, so that the deceased can visit their home for the last time. Wailing usually takes place at the home. If an Orthodox priest is unavailable to administer the last anointing, it is sometimes acceptable for a Catholic priest to do so. The person's family would need to be consulted about this.

After death, the priest says the first prayer and a candle is lit. This is repeated for 40 days, because it is believed that the soul roams on earth for 40 days, as did Christ. The lighting of the candle is symbolic in asking God for forgiveness on behalf of the deceased.

At the church, every person lights a candle as they enter, in memory of the deceased. The coffin is usually open and an icon placed on the body or the coffin. At the end of the service, everyone pays respect to the deceased and the icon, by passing the coffin.

At the cemetery, the last funeral prayer is said and the body is buried facing east, because when Christ was born the guiding star was in the East. The family has supplied a small bottle of wine mixed with oil and some wheat or bread, to the priest at the church.

When the last prayer is finished, the priest pours the wine and oil mixture over the lowered coffin, making the sign of the cross three times, symbolising the Holy Trinity and sustenance for the departing soul. The priest sprinkles earth into the grave, followed by family and friends.

In the Orthodox religion, cremation is not permitted because it is believed that we are made from earth and that we shall return to the earth.

Masses are conducted as memorials, at 3 days, 9 days, 40 days, 6 months, 12 months and 3 years. After each mass, food is eaten in honour of the deceased's soul.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESS

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that when they die they go into a kind of sleep until God resurrects them from the dead. Those who gain entrance to heaven will live with God but the vast majority of mankind will be resurrected to a restored paradise on earth.

The church elders will visit the person, pray with them and share scripture to bring the person comfort.

No rituals are performed at time of death but an elder will give comfort to friends and family of the deceased.

The funeral is usually held at the Kingdom Hall that the deceased attended or at the funeral home. The body may either be cremated or buried depending on the wishes of the deceased. Mourners will usually wear dignified clothing in muted colours out of respect for the deceased. A church elder runs the service with a sermon, prayers and singing.

A committal service may take place at the graveside if this is the wish of the family. It would include prayers and scripture, which will once again be led by the church elder.

Mourners gather at the family's house so friends and relatives can offer their sympathies. Flowers and cards are usually sent. Family and friends may come and visit the grave in the coming years to remember the deceased.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS (MORMON)

Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints (or Mormons as they are also known) believe that at death the body and the spirit separate. The spirit goes to the spirit world before being reunited with the body. The judgment will then occur and after that the person will live in Heaven with God.

The ward bishop and members of the church will offer support to the person who is dying and their family.

The ward bishop will go to the deceased's home and offer assistance to the family in making arrangements for the funeral.

Funeral services are generally conducted by the bishop in a ward chapel or in a mortuary. Although people mourn the loss of a loved one, the funeral service is viewed as a celebration

of the life of the deceased. The service will consist of a eulogy, doctrinal messages, music and prayer. The funeral is designed to bring peace and solace, as church members believe families may be reunited in the life hereafter. Mourners often send flowers to the family to show their support.

Church members who have received temple ordinances are buried in their temple clothing. The grave is dedicated as a place of peace and remembrance for the family. Cremation is generally discouraged.

The gravesite is considered to be a sacred place for the family to visit and place floral remembrances.

HINDUISM

Hinduism embraces a pantheon of gods and goddesses, with individual Hindus worshipping one or more of these. Hindus believe in reincarnation. When a person dies their soul merely moves from one body to the next on its path to reach Nirvana (Heaven). So, while it is a sad time when someone dies, it is also a time of celebration.

Family and a priest may come to pray with the dying person, sing holy songs and read holy texts. The priest may perform last rites. Other rituals can include the tying of a thread around the neck and wrist of the dying person, the sprinkling of Ganges water, or the placing of a leaf from the sacred basil bush on the tongue.

Family will pray around the body soon after death. People try to avoid touching the body as it is considered unclean. Sacred threads and other religious objects should not be removed.

The deceased will be bathed and dressed in white traditional Indian clothing. If a woman dies before her husband she will be dressed in red. The procession might pass by places that were important to the deceased. Prayers are said at the entrance to the crematorium. The body is decorated with sandalwood and flowers. Someone will read from the scriptures. The head mourner is usually a male or the eldest son and he will pray for the body's soul.

Hindus are cremated as they believe burning the body releases the spirit. The flames represent Brahma (the creator).

A priest will purify the family's home with spices and incense. A mourning period begins during which friends and relatives can visit the family and offer their sympathies. After the funeral mourners must wash and change their clothing before entering the house.

One year later Shradh occurs. This is either a one-off event or may become an annual event. Shradh is when food is given to the poor in memory of the deceased. Shradh lasts one month and a priest will say prayers for the deceased; during this time the family will not buy any new clothes or go to any parties.

JUDAISM

Beliefs may vary depending on whether the Jewish person is Orthodox, Reform or Conservative. Jews believe that when they die they will go to Heaven to be with God. This next world is called Olam HaEmet or 'the world of truth'. Death is seen as a part of life and a part of God's plan.

Family and friends will gather. A rabbi may be called to offer comfort and to pray for the person who is dying. It is a basic tenet of Judaism that a dying person should not be left alone. The reading of Psalm 23 and the reciting of the Shema prayer may be desired.

The person's eyes are closed, the body is covered and laid on the floor and candles are lit. The body is never left alone. Eating and drinking are not allowed near the body as a sign of respect. In Jewish law, being around a dead body causes uncleanness so often the washing of the body and preparations for burial will be carried out by a special group of volunteers from the Jewish community. This is considered a holy act.

Jews may not be cremated or embalmed. In Israel a coffin might not always be used but outside of Israel a coffin is almost always used. The body is wrapped in a white shroud. Mourners have the opportunity to express anguish. Tears are seen as a sign of sadness and show that the mourner is confronting death. Mourners also tear their clothing as an expression of grief.

The burial takes place as soon as possible following the death. Pallbearers will carry the casket to the grave. A family member will throw a handful of earth in the casket with the body. This is to put the body in close contact with the earth. Jewish law says each grave must have a tombstone to remember the deceased.

A candle is lit after returning from the cemetery to mark seven days of mourning called Shivah. This is when people can offer sympathies to the mourners. A meal is prepared by friends to help the mourners regain their strength. Each year the anniversary of the death is commemorated according to the Hebrew calendar. This day is observed as a solemn day of remembrance.

ISLAM

There are two types of Muslims - Shi'ite and Sunni. So beliefs and customs may be slightly different for each. Muslims believe that the soul continues to exist after death. During life a person can shape their soul for better or worse depending on how they live their life. Muslims believe there will be a day of judgment by Allah (God). Until then, the deceased remain in their graves but on judgment day they will either go to Heaven or Hell. Muslims accept death as God's will.

Muslims should be prepared for death at any time, which is partly why daily prayers are so important. A dying person may wish to die facing Mecca, the Muslim holy city. Family members and elders recite the Muslim scripture called the Koran and pray for the person. If there is no family, any Muslim can do this. Grief counselling is often not well accepted and may be considered an intrusion of privacy.

The eyes of the deceased will be closed and the body is laid out with their arms across their chest and head facing Mecca. The body will be washed by family or friends. It will be wrapped in a white shroud and prayers will be said. Contact between the body and non-Muslims is discouraged. If a non-Muslim needs to touch the body, gloves should be worn. Male staff should handle male persons, female with female persons.

The body will be buried within 24 hours as Muslims believe the soul leaves the body at the moment of death. The funeral will take place either at the graveside and involve prayer and readings from the Koran.

No women are allowed to go into the graveyard. Before burial a prayer will be recited. Mourners are forbidden from excessive demonstrations of grief. The body will not be

cremated as this is not permitted in Islam. The deceased will be buried with their face turned to the right facing Mecca. A coffin is usually not used but a chamber dug into the grave and sealed with wooden boards so no earth touches the body. The grave will usually be simple without any fancy decoration.

Three days of mourning follows where visitors are received and a special meal to remember the departed may be held. Mourners avoid decorative jewellery and clothing. Male family members go to visit the grave daily or weekly for 40 days. There will also be prayer gatherings at the home for 40 days.

After one year there will be a large prayer gathering of family and friends. After that, male family and friends visit the grave and everyone remembers the deceased in prayers.

SIKHISM

Sikhs believe in reincarnation but also that if a person lives their life according to God's plan then they can end the cycle of rebirth in this life. They believe in an afterlife where the soul meets God.

Friends and relations will be with the dying person and recite from the Sukhnam Sahib or the Guru Granth Sahib.

After passing away the deceased will be washed and dressed in clean clothes. If the deceased has fulfilled the Sikh baptismal ritual then the five symbols of Sikh membership will also be placed in the coffin. Non-Sikhs may attend the body at death.

Friend and family drive in procession to the crematorium which takes place as soon as is possible. Death is not seen as a sad occasion but an act of God and so it is forbidden to cry. There may be an opportunity to view the deceased. Hymns may be sung, prayers and the poem Sohila recited.

Cremation is the norm although Sikhs and only small children and babies will be buried. A male family member will switch the cremation oven on. The ashes will be spread in running water and are traditionally sent to India.

Afterwards the mourners will come to the temple for more hymns and readings as well as the distribution of parsad, a kind of bread/pudding, which is a symbol of God's blessing. For days after the death, Guru Granth Sahib will be read or sung regularly in order to ease the sorrows of the family. After ten days another ceremony, the Bhog, is held to formally end the mourning period.

OTHER COMMUNITIES

Traveller communities

Some Traveller communities traditionally hold elaborate wakes and funerals attended by large numbers of the extended family. Sometimes the body will be returned to family burial places in other parts of the country. Black clothes may be worn by wives or children of the deceased for up to a year. Travellers have sometimes burnt the trailer belonging to the deceased as a mark of respect.

African communities

Different religions are practised across Africa. These include Christian denominations such as Baptist, seventh day Adventist and Roman Catholic. Other religions such as Zionist Christian Church, Islam and Judaism are followed. Often the funeral is an important rite for

friends and family and the proceedings will continue for several days. The bereaved family will not leave the house during the mourning period which will vary in length. Once the mourning period has concluded a waking ceremony is held to celebrate the deceased's life. This is a joyous occasion where family and friends gather and share food and music.

Caribbean community

Different religions are practiced across the Caribbean. Ritual practice will vary according to the island. Requirements according to faith will determine how the body is laid to rest. A wake takes place before the funeral which can last for up to three days before the funeral. In preparation family and friends help clean the house, offer financial support and provide assistance with childcare. Very expressive grief is positively encouraged. The body may be sent to the island of origin to be laid to rest.

Faith and cultural considerations around suicide

It is vital to remember that every family has their own unique culture, and that there will be a wide range of attitudes towards suicide regardless of religion or culture. Members of the same family may follow different faiths and families will have particular ways they would like things to be done. It is important not to make assumptions and it is always best to ask families how they will mark the death and remember the person who has died.

Traditionally, most of the world's religions have condemned suicide. However, there has been considerable change in the past decade and the perspectives held by many faith groups have developed over recent years to reflect today's more complete understanding of the complexities of suicide. Faith Leaders now have an opportunity to bring healing and comfort to survivors by framing their informed responses with sensitivity, understanding, grace, and love.

In many cultures, grief is supported by visitors gathering in the family home, offering practical support as well as compassion. Families bereaved by suicide face additional challenges if they fear being judged by their community, and may try to conceal the truth and isolate themselves.

Schools can support by taking the lead from the family, gently encouraging them to share the truth, and offering condolences, kindness and practical help if possible. Reaching out to the Faith Leader, to explain the situation and ask them to encourage the community not to isolate them may be greatly appreciated.

"Suicide is forbidden, but it's not forbidden to help. Embrace them to help. It's happened, there's no point in judging" EMAS Home School Liaison Officer, BHCC

Appendix E: How to Respond to Parents / Carers when the school feel 'Blamed' for an Unexpected Death

Leading the response to an unexpected death, especially when the setting feels 'blamed', is exceptionally stressful.

Wellbeing of staff:

Parents / carers will understandably be very upset and search for reasons as to why their child / a student in their child's school has died. In searching for answers, staff may feel as though they are being held responsible by those closest to the deceased / the wider community and this can be painfully upsetting. Please remember that it is very common for parents / carers to deem school responsible, especially if there was bullying involved.

"What if" questions may arise after any death. After an unexpected death, these questions may be extreme and self-punishing, unrealistically condemning others for failing to predict the death or to intervene effectively or on time.

You may feel a sense of 'guilt' (as do the family and peers of the young person) and any 'blame' can be especially upsetting and difficult to hear. It can be helpful to name this and speak openly about your feelings with an identified support worker. It is important to be kind to yourself and remember an unexpected death is very complex, and with an unexpected death such as suicide, no single person or reason can be the cause of the death.

Having a conversation with the bereaved family:

Grief is hard enough, but a loss through unexpected death is like no other, and grieving can be especially complex and traumatic. Unexpected death is a difficult subject to contemplate and you may feel uncertain about how to offer help. It is important to make contact and keep the door open.

Where there is no perpetrator in a death, family and friends have nowhere to direct their anger, sadness, grief or questions. With suicide, the death may seem like an assault on those left behind, and feelings of anger, rejection and abandonment can be especially intense and difficult to bear. These emotions need to go somewhere and may be directed at the school.

If parents / carers are open to having a conversation, it is likely to be very challenging. The points below can help to ease this discussion:

- Explain that as a school you want to come together with the community to support them.
- Listen attentively and allow them the opportunity to talk without interruption. If you jump in during their explanation, it can make them feel more upset / angry.
- Calmly summarise what they have said; in doing so you are not agreeing that they are right, but that you have listened carefully and understood what they are saying.
- Validate their feelings. Tell them you understand why they're upset and why they feel the way they do. Don't be dismissive or defensive; it's important for them to understand that you care and that this is a real concern for you.
- Apologise; even if you don't see things their way, you can be sorry that this happened. Sometimes this is what they want to hear.
- Encourage them to keep in contact as the school is trying to understand and learn from this sad event.
- Keep a record of what was discussed.

Ideas for use of language in communication with parents/carers:

Remember to be careful in the use of the word 'suicide' in communication - many parents don't want to believe this even when its confirmed. Decide how you will refer to the unexpected death.

Ensure that you continue to be clear about the facts. Some information may take a while to be available and some questions may not always be answered or answered in the way people would like.

Acknowledge the range of reactions students and staff are likely to be experiencing:

- There are likely to be so many complicated thoughts and feeling around this tragic loss and we are aware that parents / carers, community members, and students may be angry, sad, confused, emotional, not be able to concentrate well, and have many questions. We understand they will need to express their grief in some way, possibly towards the school as a whole or maybe individual members.
- For any setting, this type of loss involves the pain of guilt and confusion with many questions which always follow an unexpected death. Those who knew the student may wonder, "What did I miss? What could I have done?"
- Our teachers and other staff who invest themselves in their students, are feeling vulnerable and are also grieving. They struggle with their own shock and grief, and feel a natural hurt if they feel they haven't done enough. Students feel the same and we are trying to protect them from self-blame and questioning their actions.

Ensure all communications signpost to further support.

Please use support offered:

However you are feeling right now, you may need some guidance and support, so we encourage you to use all available LA offers of help at this time.

Appendix F: Suggested Activities for a Bereavement Support Room

Public Health
Schools

Suggested Activities for a Bereavement Support Room

Following an unexpected death, it is good practice to provide a **safe, supervised room** where students' grief and needs can be expressed, responded to, and monitored. The room must be supervised by a member of SLT, the pastoral team or a mental health professional and the door should always be left ajar.

Try to make the room as **peaceful** as it can be, provide drinks and tissues, and if possible soft furnishings. Keep things simple and make sure all activities focus on:

Keep a **record** of which students are accessing the room and may be at increased risk. Ensure that students are returned to class or collected by family when they leave. Allow access for some time after the incident, or continue to use the room as a calm space in school.

Validation & Grounding

Students need to be seen, heard and for their feelings to be **understood** and **accepted**.

Activities should support students to focus on their **senses** and reconnect with the **present moment**.

Use existing approaches

Don't forget to use any existing approaches, e.g. **Emotion Coaching / Just Right**.



Mindful colouring

Colouring in can support students to **focus on the present** moment. Provide a range of colours and designs. [Just Color](#) have thousands of free printable colouring sheets in various themes.

Ask

Ask students what they would like to do and what helps them. Perhaps they would like to help with a simple sorting and organising task, or leave the building and have some time outside.

Normalise feelings using Blobs

[Blob](#) have developed a set of cards specifically around bereavement but any of the blob cards/trees can be useful to support young people to **express how they are feeling without using words**. Let students know that grief feels different for everyone. The [Young Minds Video on Grief](#) can be helpful in normalising all reactions.

Create memory jars and boxes

[Winston's Wish](#) have a whole range of activities to help grieving young people including making memory jars and boxes to remember the person who has died. Printable instructions and templates can be found [here](#) on their website.



Talk about 'the thing' without talking about 'the thing'

[Beacon House](#) have a wealth of resources for understanding and supporting children and young people who have experienced trauma. They have developed a set of [simple and safe questions](#) for talking about something upsetting.

If it was a colour, what would it be?



Playdough

Kneading, rolling, flattening and punching the playdough provides the chance to **relieve stress** and reduce feelings of anxiety and worry.

Memory Stones

For this activity you will need some **rough** stones, some **smooth** stones and some **gemstones**. Ask students to:

1

Hold a smooth stone in their hand. Squeeze. How does it feel? This stone represents the **everyday memories** of the person they have lost.



2

Feel the rough stone. Squeeze. How does it feel? This stone represents **difficult/painful memories**, such as the last time they spoke to that person.

3

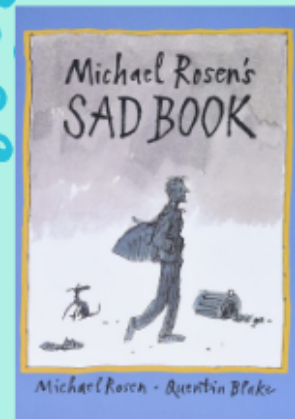
Hold the gemstone. Squeeze. How does it feel? This stone represents **special memories** of that person.

4

Hold all 3 stones at the same time. Squeeze. How does that feel? Explain that **it's OK to have mixed memories** of the person who has died.

Provide books and resources

Visit [Child Bereavement UK](#) and [Winston's Wish](#) for **books and leaflets** to support children bereaved by sudden death. Provide information for adults in the room about stages of grief and normal reactions.



Breathing techniques

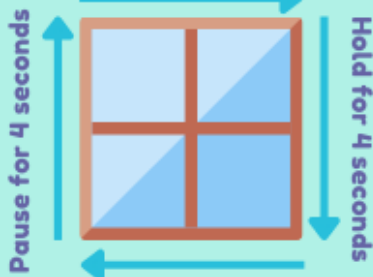
Breathing techniques can help **manage feelings of stress, anxiety and panic**. Pooky Knightsmith demonstrates all the techniques below as well as many others on her [YouTube Channel](#).



Wave/Belly/7:11 Breathing

Sit up straight or lie down, **place one or two hands on your belly**, breathe in deeply through your nose for a count of 7 and feel your belly move out, breathe out as far as you can through your mouth for a count of 11 and feel your tummy flatten.

Breathe in for 4 seconds



Breathe out for 4 seconds

Box breathing

Draw or trace a **square** with your finger and count your breaths as you move round. It can be helpful to look at something square while you do so, for example a window.

5 Finger Breathing

Use one finger to **trace the outline of the other hand**, breathe in when moving up a finger, pause at the top, breathe out when moving down a finger and pause again at the bottom. Afterwards ask 'do I feel better, or do I need to take another 5?' Repeat as necessary.

Support tree

Ask students to draw round their hands and write **messages of support** to each other inside. A member of staff can then cut out the hands, which can then be displayed as leaves on a tree. Explain that the tree symbolises that in difficult times, we all need to support each other.



Appendix G: Suggested Agenda for the Initial Staff Meeting

This meeting is typically conducted by the school Leader or school Crisis Management Team Leader if one has been allocated, and should be held as soon as possible (ideally before school starts in the morning).

Depending on when the death occurs, there may not be enough time to hold the meeting before students have begun to hear the news through word of mouth, text messaging or other means. If this happens, the school Crisis Management Team Leader should first verify the accuracy of the reports and then notify staff of the death through the school's predetermined crisis alert system (such as e-mail or calls to classroom phones). Remember that information about the cause of death should be withheld until the family has been consulted.

Goals of the initial staff meeting

- Introduce the school Crisis Management Team members.
- Share accurate information about the death.
- Allow staff an opportunity to express their own reactions and grief. The school Crisis Management Team may identify staff that may need additional support and, following the meeting, refer them to appropriate resources (see [Appendix K - Sources of Support for Staff](#)).
- Provide appropriate staff with information to share with students informing them of the death (see [Appendix L - Informing students about the unexpected death of a student](#) and if applicable [Appendix M - Supporting Bereaved Children and Young People with Special Education Needs](#))
- Arrange cover for any staff who feel unable to manage sharing the news with students.
- Prepare for student reactions and questions by discussing the issue with staff. You should also provide staff with [Appendix H - Supporting grieving children & young people in Education \(Winston's Wish\)](#), [Appendix I - Talking about Death and Dying with students \(Winston's Wish\)](#) and if applicable [Appendix J - How to Talk about Suicide with Young People \(Headspace\)](#)
- Explain plans for the day, including locations of support rooms.
- Highlight the importance of not asking students for information relating to the death, but passing on what they are told or observe.
- Brief staff about identifying and referring at-risk students (see 2.2 in the guidance for more information around identifying at-risk students), as well as the need to keep records of those efforts.
- Inform staff of any outside support staff or others who will be assisting.
- Identify which school Crisis Management Team member has been designated as the media spokesperson and instruct staff to refer all media inquiries to them.

NB Information about the cause of death should be withheld until the family has been consulted.

End of the first day staff meeting

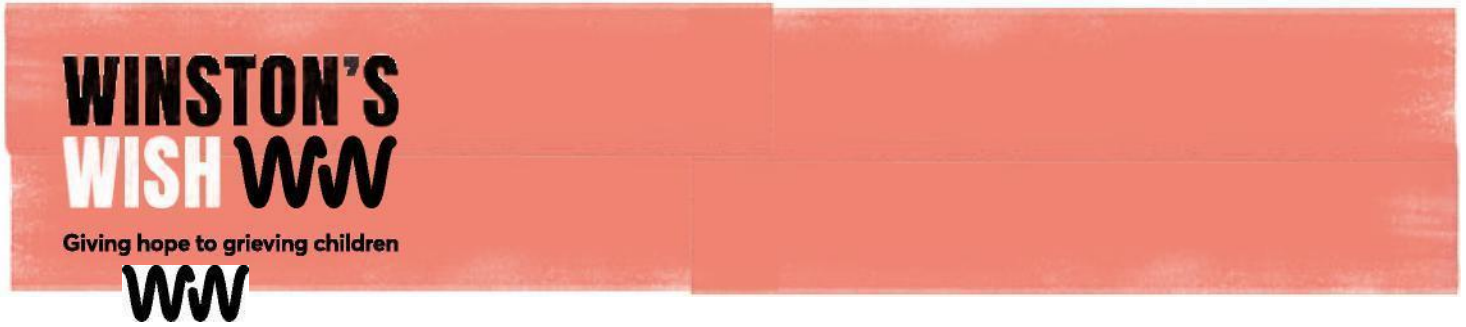
It can also be helpful for the school Leader and / or the school Crisis Management Team Leader to have an all-staff meeting at the end of the first day.

This meeting provides an opportunity to take the following steps:

- Offer verbal appreciation of the staff.

- Review the day's challenges and successes.
- Debrief, share experiences, express concerns and ask questions.
- Check-in with staff to assess whether any of them need additional support (and refer accordingly).
- Disseminate any new information regarding the death and / or funeral arrangements.
- Discuss plans for the next day.
- Remind staff of the importance of self-care.

Appendix H: Supporting Grieving Children & Young People in Education



A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING

GRIEVING CHILDREN

AND YOUNG PEOPLE

IN EDUCATION

June 2019

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INTRODUCTION

Death is one of the most difficult subjects to address in school. It is inevitable though, that at some point in every teacher's career, the school community will be affected by a death in some way or another.

This is most likely to be following the death of a student's family member, carer or friend. But, it might be the death of a student, the death of a staff member, or the death of a key member in the school community such as a governor or popular visitor to the school.

In the modern world, news travels fast to children and young people, often via social media. We know from our own work that tragic national events like the Grenfell Tower fire and the terror attacks in London and Manchester bring questions about death and dying to the fore. Children may look to their teachers and schools as well as their parents and communities to help them understand what they have seen or been told about even if it does not affect them directly.

This pack draws on many years' experience of practitioners at Winston's Wish working with schools and with school staff across the country. We know how important the support of teachers is to grieving children, and how much our teachers want to help. These materials are designed to give you confidence and plenty of ideas for how to deal with the subject in lessons, tutorials and assemblies, as well as on an individual basis.

In responding to a death and helping others it is important to acknowledge your own feelings and those of other staff members. As well as powerful feelings that relate to this death it may trigger memories and reactions from past losses.


You are never alone, our Helpline is only a call away and our highly trained Helpline practitioners talk to thousands of teachers every year who are supporting bereaved children and young people, or who are dealing with serious incidents in schools. You can call as many times as you need to. For more help, advice or ideas please ring the Winston's Wish Freephone National Helpline (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) on 08088 020 021 and speak to our experienced practitioners. You can also connect with us via our Live Chat service and our ASK email service (ask@winstonswish.org). We also offer a range of study days and bespoke training. Details on how to access this support is at: www.winstonswish.org.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Just do what you can when you can. Any attempt to offer your support or help will be appreciated by a grieving child or young person
- As you read this guidance it is important to remember that your own knowledge and instincts are key in how to put this into practice in your setting
- Focus your support around the real needs of the child and family. Put them in the driving seat, be guided by them, and make sure they feel as though the support they are getting feels right to them
- There is more than one way to help. Choose the things you feel most comfortable with and get help with the things you don't
- Talk about the person who died
- Accept that some things can't be made 'better' in a short space of time - be patient, be consistent, be available and be aware that children are likely to revisit their grief as they grow and develop
- Talk to children in words that they can understand and ask questions to check their understanding
- Give information a bit at a time if children are younger. Pieces of the 'jigsaw puzzle' can be put together over time to make a complete picture
- Encourage children to ask questions and keep trying to answer them - be honest if there is no answer or you just don't know. Always answer honestly and simply
- Be willing and open to making a referral to an outside agency or signpost a family to specialist support if that will help
- Look after yourself - talking about death and supporting distressed children can be very emotionally demanding. Always reach out to your school's support systems or to organisations who can provide you with support to process some of these feelings and experiences. Winston's Wish Helpline may be able to signpost you to such organisations in your area.

TALKING ABOUT DEATH AND DYING WITH STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

Sometimes our natural reaction to death is not to talk about it. We assume that the bereaved person will not want to, that they will view us as nosy, and we fear that by mentioning it we will upset them.



But, as we often say, the worst thing that could happen...already has. You are unlikely to make it worse and, in fact, acknowledging and validating the experience that a child or young person is going through is likely to be helpful and positive to them.

Most bereaved children will at some point be very glad to have the chance to talk about what has happened, and will appreciate that a teacher cares enough to ask about them and their feelings. Although the teacher mentioned in the quote above had almost certainly acted with the best intentions, and had not wanted to upset their student, what the student perceived from their actions was that the teacher did not care. This only added to their sense of isolation and hurt.

Here are some of the most common pieces of advice we give to those people supporting a bereaved child or family:

Be honest

Death is not an easy subject for anyone. If you are upset too - do not be afraid to admit it. Model the fact that difficult feelings are ok, and totally normal, many children and young people tell us that they really appreciate and respect adults who are honest about their experiences and feelings.

Use clear language

Trying to avoid the death by using phrases such as “your loss” and “gone to a better place” can frustrate older children and confuse younger ones. A six-year-old who hears that her Dad has been lost may try to find him, because that is what you do when someone is lost.

Simply use language which is real and clear; “I was really sorry to hear that your Dad died last week, how are you feeling?”

Expect questions, but don't feel pressured to provide immediate answers

Death often throws up many questions for us all. Some of these may seem straightforward and obvious under the circumstances, such as ‘How does smoking cause cancer?’ to the more complex ‘Why do some people die so young without warning?’ If there are questions that you are unable to answer, feel able to say so, and promise to look into providing an answer at a later point.

Recognise that every death and every reaction to it is unique

The way in which a child reacts to a death is dependent on their relationship with the person who died, the time of death in that child's development, the nature of the death (was it expected after a long fight against an illness or was it sudden?), the child's understanding of death, their support network and many other factors.

Don't assume anything

Ask the student how they feel, rather than projecting feelings that you might expect them to have. Be mindful that other children may be affected by a death, for instance, because of a close friendship, because this is their first encounter with death, or because they have experienced other bereavements.

Allow time and space for students to digest the news, find out the facts and discover exactly how they feel

For many, this will be their first experience of someone they know dying and it will have a huge impact on them.

3

© Winston's Wish

Be prepared for children to move in and out of grief

Children may be distraught one moment and then the next, need to ask what is for lunch, or express annoyance that it is raining outside. Although this may catch us off guard, this is completely normal, so try not to worry about it or second guess them on it. It is helpful to be accepting and encouraging of the dual, and apparently opposed needs, that most children have. On the one hand they need to be able to engage in 'normal' activities and be treated the same as everyone else, on the other they need to know their grief is acknowledged and accepted and allowance is made for things that may have changed or be difficult for them. Even when children appear to be getting on with things as they did before and outwardly appear to be unaffected, this does not mean they don't need access to ongoing support. In particular, it is important to acknowledge their loss, for instance at anniversaries or other significant dates, and let them know that the door is always open for them to talk about their loss and how it affects them.

Act early to prevent rumours from spreading, or gossip being spread around the school

Our response to death is often something that we mask when in public. Some people mask it with humour. Among children this humour can be less tempered by social graces and so can be very hurtful, as can rumours about a death or an individual. Try to prevent these at all times, but remember that unkind words are sometimes born out of fear. This does not, and should not excuse them, but may help us deal better with the students concerned.

Try to normalise the feelings that a bereaved young person shares with you

They are probably very worried that they are the only person who has ever felt this way. Assure them that feelings of anger, fatigue, fear, worry, stress, sadness, exhaustion, guilt, anxiety, frustration, loneliness, lack of focus etc. are all a normal reaction to grief

HOW AGE AND STAGE CAN AFFECT UNDERSTANDING AND GRIEF

Children's experience of a death can differ from adults'. The following provides a guide to a developmental perspective of how a child may understand bereavement. For a child with SEND, his or her functional level of understanding (rather than actual chronological age) will be the biggest factor in how the child reacts to a death and what he or she will be able to understand. The reactions and issues described at each stage often apply equally to children at other stages of development too.

Children under 3 years old

Very young children and babies are not able to understand death but experience the loss as a separation from someone they have an attachment to. Children at this age have little language to express their loss and will react to it by crying inconsolably or become withdrawn. They will be affected by the emotional state of their care givers. They may repeatedly search for the deceased person or have an unspoken expectation that they will 'return'. They also benefit from the same type of consistent and repeated explanations as detailed below for ages 3 to 5 and the maintenance of routine.

Early Years Education - aged 3 to 5 - Preschool and Reception

When a child this young experiences the death of someone important, it is important they are helped to know about the person as an integral part of their history. Young children often ask the same questions over and over again in an effort to understand their loss. They are naturally curious and they want to make sense of what is happening in their world. Their repeated questions are not a sign that our explanations aren't good enough. 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.

At this age, they may not understand that death is permanent or that it happens to every living thing. A 4-year-old may be able to tell others confidently that 'my daddy's dead' and may even be able to explain how 'he was hit by a car and he died'. However, the next sentence may be: 'I hope he'll be back before my birthday' or 'He's picking me up tonight'. They may worry about how the person who has died will eat breathe and keep warm. It is important to give them simple, factual information and tell them that once someone has died, their body stops working so they don't feel pain anymore and they don't feel hot or cold and they don't need to eat or drink anything.

Children's thoughts are concrete and characterised by "magical thinking". They may struggle to understand abstract concepts (such as heaven) or roundabout ways of explaining death (e.g. 'gone to sleep'). Children may believe it was something they said or did that caused the death or they may believe their words, actions or thoughts can bring the person back. They need to be reassured that the death was not their fault and gently reminded that the person will not come back. By using concrete words such as "Mummy has died" and giving specific explanations about why the person died can help.

It is important to maintain a routine as normal as possible for the child. It is not unusual for children of this age to revert to younger behaviours such as separation anxiety, incontinence, and use of a security blanket or thumb sucking. Being tolerant and managing the separation will be helpful for the child and the family. In time, it is most likely these earlier behaviour patterns will disappear once 'new normal' family routines are established.

Key Stage 1 - Ages 5 to 7 - Years 1 and 2

Children of this age are beginning to understand that death is permanent; however, some confusion may still stand. When first told of the death, younger children may be mainly concerned with the 'when' and 'where' of the death. They may express concerns about their own future such as: 'What will happen to me? Who will meet me after school? Will I still go to Cubs?' Giving reassurance about everyday activities and arrangements continuing as normal, or clear explanations about alternative arrangements, will be helpful for the child.

Children may become clingy or more reluctant to see parents and carers leave. There may be a need to stick close to their parent to protect them from the mysterious occurrence that made their dad disappear or at least to be with them if it happens again. 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 we feel things like sadness and worry in our bodies too.

They can also feel that in some way they were responsible for the death, e.g. 'I was angry with him and shouted at him when he left for work because he wouldn't fix my bike. I refused to give him a hug. And then he never came home again. It's my fault.' It can be worth saying something like: 'You do know, don't you, that nothing you said or did made this happen?'

Key Stage 2 - Ages 7 to 11 - Years 3, 4, 5 and 6

As children begin to understand more about death and dying, a death in the family may make them anxious about the health and safety of surviving members of the family. They may feel very responsible for their parent(s) and younger siblings and feel the need to keep a close eye on their safety.

Children this age can find it difficult to talk about their bereavement and express their feelings behaviourally, such as withdrawing from others or showing increased aggression. They may experience difficulties in their interactions with their peers, particularly as 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 avoid clichés like "You're being so brave" as children can interpret this as they should not share their feelings. They may need a safe space or quiet area away from peers to calm down or express their emotions with an adult.

Children of this age also show curiosity about 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, factual explanations. Children can also think of death as something spooky, like a zombie, or a spirit that comes to get you. Normalising feelings, talking about or drawing specific worries and sharing bad dreams can be reassuring, giving children skills and confidence to feel more in charge of them.

By the age of 10, children will usually have all of the bits of the jigsaw puzzle of understanding. They will even understand that they are able to cause their own death. They will appreciate clear and detailed information - beyond 'when', 'where' and 'how' the death happened, they will be interested in 'why'.

Key Stage 3 - Ages 11 to 14 - Years 7, 8, and 9

In this age range young people 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. They begin to move away from dependence on the family and they start to form important relationships with other young people, however the death of someone important can easily destabilise them, leaving them feeling unsafe and more dependent on the family. Some older children and teenagers may feel internal conflict as a result of feeling a pull towards being with their peers at the same time as their own need or an expectation that they spend time with their family.

Their ability to manage their feelings may be disrupted and lead to mood swings or more definite up's and down's 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. It is important to find ways to build their self-esteem.

Young people 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. Talking through these future events and exploring ways of including the person can be helpful.

Key Stage 4 and Sixth Form - Ages 14 to 18 - Years 10, 11, 12 and 13

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 their future. Young people 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.

It is quite common for risk-taking behaviour to increase during adolescence as young people test the boundaries. Although an adolescent's thought 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 care and support and to know that the limits you set are still enforced.

As always, if you have any concerns about a young person's safety it is vital you take a pro-active approach and apply your safeguarding policies and procedures.

WHAT GRIEVING CHILDREN FEEL AND HOW THEY MIGHT BEHAVE IN SCHOOL

Although research suggests that the death of a parent is one of the hardest losses a child has to face, every bereavement comes with its own difficult factors. For example, the death of an older sibling will mean the child processing how it feels to reach and pass their sibling's age.

The death of someone important may cause a child or young person to feel some or all of the following:

- Deep sadness, that may or may not be expressed in conventional ways such as crying
- A hollow, achy pain inside that is hard to put into words and may be described as hunger or boredom or fear
- A sense of numbness which makes it hard for them to describe or connect to any feelings
- Loneliness and a sense of having been abandoned
- Anxiety about the safety and well-being of the rest of the family, especially parent/s
- That they may have to become more responsible for instance, to be the 'man of the house' or to mother younger siblings or generally to be 'no trouble and be very good'
- Hopeless - that there's no point in anything anymore, including school work
- Anger and even rage at what has happened
- Blame, or guilt, or shame, for things said or unsaid, done or undone
- Relief - if the family situation, dynamics, illness, addiction, or behaviour had been difficult, often accompanied by guilt
- Physical symptoms (for example, headaches, stomach aches or perhaps symptoms which reflect their worries they have the same illness)
- Sadness with parents' emotional exhaustion and absorption in their own grief - "Mummy doesn't play anymore"

Challenging behaviours

Following the death of someone close to them, a student's behaviour may well be intermittently affected by their grief. They can sometimes sense a lack of control over their emotions, and may react in some situations in a way that you might not expect. If a bereaved student displays disruptive behaviour it is right that this is sensitively addressed and explored taking into account their loss.

It is important to be aware of anniversaries and days which might make this time more difficult for the student. For example, it would not be appropriate to give a detention for missing deadlines in the week of the funeral, but dangerous and aggressive behaviour would need to be addressed as per your school policy. It is important to maintain consistent boundaries and at the same time recognise that very powerful difficult feelings may underlie behaviour. Avoid phrases such as "What would your Dad say? Is this the way in which he would want you to behave?" as these add unnecessary pressure and could add to false guilt and shame.

Different causes of death

No means or cause of death is better or worse than another for a grieving child. There is no hierarchy of death - they are all overwhelming. However, young people's responses to the death of someone important will vary according to:

- Their age
- Their relationship with the person
- Previous experience of death or trauma within the family
- Their own resilience and the support and care they receive
- The cause and nature of the death (for example, whether sudden or expected, whether by suicide or violence)

If a death is expected (for example, through cancer or other illness), the family may have had time to prepare for the loss, to begin to adjust to the future without the person, to make sure that photographs have been

taken, letters to open in the future have been written, goodbyes said. It is very likely that the family will have received help - and will continue to receive help - from a hospice-based service or other support service (such as Macmillan nurses). The family may have experienced a prolonged period of stress and anxiety where 'normal' day to day activities were occupied with caring for the person who was dying. It can be hard to adjust this balance even after someone has died as this has been a way of coping for so long. Even if a long-term illness has meant that the death was expected, no amount of preparation can make someone numb to the experience, nor should it.

If a death is sudden (for example, through a heart attack or road accident) there is no chance for goodbyes and no chance for preparations or adjustment. The last conversations linger in the memory.

If a death is through suicide, there are particular difficulties for the families left behind. It has been estimated that for every suicide, six people will experience intense grief - and many more will be deeply affected. Those bereaved through suicide face especially intense feelings and thoughts, ask themselves more agonising questions and face more public scrutiny.

For those bereaved through homicide, it is a double blow to families - not only do they have to cope with a sudden, unexpected death, they also have to deal with the way their relative has died. A family may feel very alone in their grief but, sadly, more people are bereaved through murder or manslaughter than most of us realise. These are ordinary children in extraordinary circumstances. For both children and adults, it can take a long time to dare to trust others again.

For more information about supporting a child bereaved in any circumstance, please call our Helpline and speak with one of our practitioners who will be able to advise.

HOW TO SUPPORT STUDENTS AFTER A DEATH IN THE FAMILY OR IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Breaking the news after a death in the school community

Telling students when a death has occurred in the school community needs time and planning amongst teaching staff. An assembly can be used for breaking the news about the death of a student or a member of staff. The benefit is that the entire school receives the same news, at the same time, which helps prevent speculation and rumours around the school. If you decide to tell the whole school at once it is essential that you have planned for a space to provide more information and support for students following the assembly and that they do not go straight back to normal lessons. An alternative way is to plan for teachers to tell students in individual classes at the same time (i.e. first thing in the morning) so that every class hears the news simultaneously. This allows a safe, contained space for students' reactions to be supported and for them to express any thoughts and feelings about the news they have just received. Having a practical activity such as writing cards can help the transition into break time.

Using simple, honest age-appropriate language, explain that the person has died. Talk a little about how they died, whether by an accident (i.e. "he was knocked down by a car and taken to hospital, but sadly he was too badly hurt and he died") or through an illness (i.e. "Mr Smith was very ill on Saturday - his heart stopped working properly. We need our hearts to make the blood go around our bodies. Although the doctors tried very hard to make Mr Smith's heart work again, it didn't work and Mr Smith died because his heart stopped working. This is called a 'heart attack' or a 'cardiac arrest'").

Talk about the feelings the students might have and normalise these "some of you may be very shocked at this news, some of you might feel very sad or worried, some of you might not feel anything at all - it's ok to have any of these feelings. If you want to talk about how you feel, or cry, or laugh about your memories of him, then that is ok too and we will be here for you. We will try and answer any questions that you might have".

HELPING A STUDENT RETURNING TO SCHOOL AFTER A DEATH IN THE FAMILY

Following any significant bereavement within the family, the needs of individual students will be carefully considered by teaching staff. These hints, tips, and ideas will help you to engage with an individual student in such an instance. Remember, they may want to do all, some, or none of these. They may want to talk straight away, or not for several months. Knowing that you are available, honest, understanding and trustworthy will be a great comfort to the student concerned.

What should I expect?

Often a student may be off school for a few days after the death. Immediately after the death the prospect of them ever coming back to school again can seem impossible for them to comprehend. Or, it may be the very thing that they want so that they can “experience normality” again and “take their mind off things”. It is impossible to know quite how a student of yours may react. A simple phone call home can be a great way of determining this and also letting the family know that you care. No student has ever failed to be impressed by a teacher who went out of their way to make a tough phone call. A visit to the family home can also be especially helpful, and help you to get some idea of the family’s frame of mind.

How should I tell the class?

If possible, liaise with the student about their return. Ideally you will consult with them as to how other friends and class mates are told about what has happened. They may like to get straight back into things and be treated almost as if nothing has happened. The chances are that they will have been surrounded by grieving family members for days and all they want is a break from it. Equally they may want to answer questions from their classmates - this can help some children cope. Again, make sure the decision is theirs and that you are available to support them the whole time.

What can I do to make their return to school as easy as possible?

Whilst the student is off school, you may like to involve them in how you tell the rest of the class about what has happened. It is important that they feel they have a say in this, but it is worth gently challenging them if they suggest that no-one is told. This can be done by pointing out that others may be unknowingly insensitive, for instance, maybe asking if they have been skiving whilst off school. If there is time get the class to write letters or cards to them, assuring them of how sorry they are to hear the news, but also how much they are looking forward to them coming back. This will be a great parcel for you to deliver to the family home, and will make the return to school much easier.

Keep the student informed about what has been going on in their absence. It may be helpful to think through with them about how they can answer difficult questions others might ask them, or what to say if they don’t want to talk about things at any time, for example, ‘I feel really sad he died, and I don’t feel ready to talk about it at the moment’.

Organise their first day back to be not quite normal. Get them to come in at break time, this way they can talk to who they want to rather than be subjected to all kinds of questioning before school. Maybe have some of their best friends meet them and chat together in the staffroom for a bit - make them feel special.

Will their behaviour have changed?

Maybe. This won't be a permanent thing, but immediately after the death they may not seem their 'normal' self. They may:

- **Have less concentration**
- **Be a lot more tired and therefore irritable**
- **Have a heightened sensitivity to comments and remarks**
 - **Be so wrapped up in their own feelings that they fail to take the feelings of others into account, which can result in arguments and fights**
- **Could have a lot of un-vented anger and frustration about the death**

It is important that you recognise that some, or all these things may happen, and that you are ready to be patient and understanding. It is also important though that normal rules and expectations of behaviour are maintained. Boundaries and a routine actually helps, and a lack of it may cause more problems within the class and amongst peers.

One resource we recommend is 'I Can...You Can' a unique set of postcards published by the Childhood Bereavement Network that helps a child or young person express what help they might need to the key people in their lives. It also helps remind them of some of their own coping strategies - ncb.org.uk/product/214

GIVING ADVICE

You may find that a Student and/or family members look to you for advice on a range of death related topics. For instance, about seeing the body or attending the funeral. Although it's the decision of the family, there has been research that found that children value and appreciate being involved in important rituals. It is vital that they are prepared and informed and their needs thought through in advance. You may feel confident to advise in these areas and/or may like to suggest that parents/carers call our Helpline.

TEACHING, LEARNING AND GRIEF

A death within the school community can have a huge effect on the school as a whole. Speaking with a single child about the death of a parent or sibling needs to be discreet and sensitive to their individual needs, dealing with a death which affects many students has to be far more 'managed' by the school.

The school curriculum provides opportunities for students and their teachers to explore experiences and feelings associated with bereavement. Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) gives students and teachers a forum for discussing relationships, feelings and emotions, and for thinking about how to manage these in relation to family events.

The curriculum is rich in areas in which issues of life and death are regularly covered, including in English Literature, the Sciences, Religious Studies and History.

Thoughtful planning using some of the information in this guide means that curriculum coverage can be sensitively developed and delivered, and that there is meaningful and relevant learning that follows.

Before delivering any lessons or sessions that cover topics of death or bereavement, teachers should take great care to think through how it may affect bereaved children they are teaching. Families and children should be consulted over whether it is appropriate for them to attend lessons, or whether additional support may be needed. It is important that lessons take account of different religious and cultural beliefs. In some cases, it may work well to involve a bereaved Student in planning a lesson. It will nearly always be helpful for them to at least know summary details of what is to be covered.

The following ideas provide examples of some activities that may help to -

- **support a bereaved child or young person and their family**
- **preserve a continuing link with the person who has died**
- **involve children and young people in the mourning process**
- **help children and young people take steps along their unique bereavement journeys**

Group memory work ideas

The following ideas are specifically designed to be used when a whole school is affected by a death of a student, a staff member or other significant adult. They can be used by teaching staff to help students explore the issue of death and their reactions to it further. Students will benefit greatly from being able to take part in these activities, place their feelings in context and realise that their feelings, although maybe alien to them, are totally normal. They are intended to show that speaking about death can be done in a

positive way, and students can be helped to understand what is going on in an open, safe and nurturing environment. This is always better than children suppressing and hiding these feelings and thoughts. The lesson ideas are designed so that a lesson can easily be built from them, and the ideas adapted to best suit your needs.

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Memory stones

The concept of memory stones is a very simple one, yet it is a great tool to help students to speak honestly about their feelings and their memories. It can be used in individual sessions or as a group activity. Depending on the size of the group and their closeness to the person who has died, it may be good to let each child have a set of the three stones. This will help them to remember the point and manage their feelings.

First, hold a jagged, rocky pebble up high. Either you or some students should then describe it. It is rough, and has sharp bits. Ask a student to hold it tightly and squeeze it in the palm of their hands - how does it feel? Not nice, it may even hurt a little. Use this pebble to explain that there may be some difficult memories or feelings that some students have right now. For instance, they may be struggling with the way in which the person died, or they may be feeling guilty that they had a difficult relationship with the person or wish that they had said or done something differently the last time they saw them.

Next, hold a normal rounded pebble. Again, you may want to ask students to describe it. You are looking to find words such as “normal” “smooth” “ordinary”. State that this stone signifies the ordinary, everyday memories that students may have of the person who died; the fact that they ate prawn cocktail crisps or liked English lessons.

Finally, display a shiny, precious gemstone. The characteristics of this stone are that it is sparkling and precious, it looks great. Use this to explain that we will have some great memories of the person who died. It may be a best holiday or a special trip to the theatre, or an evening spent watching a film curled up together on the sofa or a fun activity enjoyed by the whole class.

All three stones are important and the feelings and memories described by them are all true. The stones can all be held together in one hand, and the memories can all be held in our minds together.

Holding an assembly to say goodbye

After a death, we can often be left with a strong urge to ‘do something’ which marks the significance of the death and which states its importance to us. For family members this is usually the funeral or a ceremony of some other sort. It is not always either appropriate or possible for school children to attend these occasions though, so facilitating something within the school context can feel important.

Holding a special assembly or remembrance service can be useful as it brings the school together to acknowledge what has happened and as a community, the school can remember the person who has died. Death is so often difficult to talk about - an assembly helps to normalise and share grief, to let students know it is ok to be sad and want to talk and equally it is ok to not feel affected.

The assembly can be for anyone who wishes to be there - staff, students and any family members who feel able to attend. In a large school it may be more appropriate to hold a year group assembly if space does not allow a whole school assembly. Similarly, anyone who wishes to could be involved with planning the assembly, with adult support depending on the child’s age and understanding. This can help students to feel involved and give them a sense of doing something positive.

At the start of the assembly, give clear information as to the purpose and length of the assembly by a brief, factual reminder of the person who died and the circumstances. During the assembly, the following provide a few ideas that are easy to do, yet significant.

- **Light a memory candle and reflect for a minute, or,**
- **Listen to some music which was significant to the person who has died**
- **Create a memory box or book. Invite students to write a memory in the book about the person who has died, or place an object that means something to them and that has a story attached to it in the memory box. (Children make mistakes, which especially in sensitive circumstances can upset them. You may want to get them to write on cards which are then stuck into the book, rather than directly into the book itself)**

- Invite students or staff to take turns recounting stories or memories. Students may wish to write poems, songs or letters about the person who died
- Show pictures and talk about memories associated with them

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Ending the assembly requires careful planning as it needs to leave everyone with a sense of looking forward. Some suggestions include:

- **Asking students to bring a farewell message to the person who has died to put into a special box as they leave. This can help students to personalise a goodbye**
- **Giving a memory box or memory book to the family**
- **Blowing out the remembrance candle**
- **Write messages on card (this can be folded over and taped if it is a private message) and attach to a colourful piece of string or wool that is suspended around a tree or other beautiful object**
- **Plant a memorial tree or bulbs to create a special memory garden**
- **Reflective but uplifting music helps to create the right atmosphere**

Arranging the assembly before a break is helpful to give students and staff time to reflect before carrying on with the normal school day. Leaving a memorial assembly for the end of lessons can be hard, as the build up through the day can be difficult and students need time to compose themselves before going home. Be prepared for different responses: some students may be deeply affected, others not at all, or react with out-of-character behaviour. Talk about where to go for support if required. Give parents information, such as the Winston's Wish helpline number, for support outside school.

Working individually with a bereaved student

Making a memory box

Bereaved children may benefit from collecting into a special box items that remind them of the person who has died and times shared with them. Examples could be: cards received, perfume or aftershave, shells from a beach holiday, tickets from an outing, an item of clothing or jewellery, flowers from the funeral, photographs, etc. Every time the child turns over the items in the box, they are turning over the memories of the person in their mind and thus keeping fresh their memories. You can find specially designed memory boxes and information sheets in the Winston's Wish online shop.

Making a memory book

This is a paper-based version of a memory box. A scrapbook can contain pictures, drawings, tickets, postcards, letters, and certificates - all important keepsakes connected with the person who has died.

Family record

A family record can help a child or young person gain a sense of where they and the person who has died fits into the family. A family tree can be put together. Family photographs, documents, certificates and mementoes can be included. It can be particularly powerful to include stories about the person's life, which can be contributed by family members and friends; this is often a welcome way for them to be involved. For example, what was the funniest thing the person ever did? What was their best subject at school? What was the bravest thing they ever did? If you are going to include videos or audio recordings of the person who has died - please consider making a copy - just to be on the safe side.

Telling the story

It is important that children and young people gain a clear understanding of what happened to the person who died. Listening to them tell what happened gives a chance gently to correct any misunderstandings, to provide additional information and to answer any questions. Younger children may appreciate using dolls, model figures or puppets to tell the story. Older children may prefer to use paper and pens. It can help them tell what happened if they break the story into five or so pieces: -

- **What was life like before they died? (Some idea of the family before the death)**
- **What happened just before they died? (Earlier in the day, the day before...)**
- **How did they die? What happened?**
- **What happened immediately afterwards?**
- **What is life like now?**

Ideas for supporting a student within lessons

There may be days when Students are finding it hard to think about anything other than the person who has died, and they have no space in their minds to focus on school work. On these days, Students may complete less work, and teachers may need to reduce their curriculum demands accordingly.

The following ideas will give the Student a way of communicating that they are having a difficult day.

Feeling faces

For younger bereaved students it can be helpful to have a sheet of paper/paper plate with two drawings of faces on either side, one happy, one sad. The student shows the side that reflects how they are feeling on a particular day. This gives the teacher an idea of how they are and therefore what approach to use. Older students may wish to use the time out cards (see below).

Time out cards

This allows the student permission to leave class for a short time when they begin to feel out of control or just to get some "personal space" when upset. They carry a card in their pocket and the student may leave the room without having to ask. It is important to let staff know about the procedure to avoid embarrassing scenes for either the student or the teacher. The student must know of a designated place and person to go to in these times, as they will not be allowed to wander the school.

Hand in my pocket

Holding on to something tangible can be a real comfort for bereaved children and young people. Carrying something small in their pocket is a discrete way to feel close to someone important - either someone who has died, or someone from home to help manage separation anxiety. This could be a soft piece of fabric, a small teddy or key ring, a message, or a pebble or stone.

The post box

A way to communicate with students who find it difficult to verbalise feelings can be through writing or drawing. The teacher has a post box where students can leave messages, questions, feelings, worries and the teacher can either respond by a letter or spend some one-to-one time with the child.

WE ARE HERE TO HELP

If you require assistance with any aspect of this guide or would like more information about supporting bereaved children and young people please contact us on our Freephone National Helpline during office hours: **08088 020 021** or email us at ask@winstonswish.org

Take a look at our website: www.winstonswish.org to contact us by Live Chat and for more information about our resources and guidance.

A range of specialist publications are available to buy through the Winston's Wish website shop.winstonswish.org

If you require information about our twilight training sessions, study days and bespoke training please take a look at the website, contact us by phone on **01242 515157** or email training@winstonswish.org

HOW AGE AND STAGE CAN AFFECT UNDERSTANDING AND GRIEF

Children's experience of a death can differ from adults'. The following provides a guide to a developmental perspective of how a child may understand bereavement. For a child with SEND, his or her functional level of understanding (rather than actual chronological age) will be the biggest factor in how the child reacts to a death and what he or she will be able to understand. The reactions and issues described at each stage often apply equally to children at other stages of development too.

Children under 3 years old

Very young children and babies are not able to understand death but experience the loss as a separation from someone they have an attachment to. Children at this age have little language to express their loss and will react to it by crying inconsolably or become withdrawn. They will be affected by the emotional state of their care givers. They may repeatedly search for the deceased person or have an unspoken expectation that they will 'return'. They also benefit from the same type of consistent and repeated explanations as detailed below for ages 3 to 5 and the maintenance of routine.

Early Years Education – aged 3 to 5 – Preschool and Reception

When a child this young experiences the death of someone important, it is important they are helped to know about the person as an integral part of their history. Young children often ask the same questions over and over again in an effort to understand their loss. They are naturally curious and they want to make sense of what is happening in their world. Their repeated questions are not a sign that our explanations aren't good enough. 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.

At this age, they may not understand that death is permanent or that it happens to every living thing. A 4-year-old may be able to tell others confidently that 'my daddy's dead' and may even be able to explain how 'he was hit by a car and he died'. However, the next sentence may be: 'I hope he'll be back before my birthday' or 'He's picking me up tonight'. They may worry about how the person who has died will eat breathe and keep warm. It is important to give them simple, factual information and tell them that once someone has died, their body stops working so they don't feel pain anymore and they don't feel hot or cold and they don't need to eat or drink anything.

Children's thoughts are concrete and characterised by "magical thinking". They may struggle to understand abstract concepts (such as heaven) or roundabout ways of explaining death (e.g. 'gone to sleep'). Children may believe it was something they said or did that caused the death or they may believe their words, actions or thoughts can bring the person back. They need to be reassured that the death was not their fault and gently reminded that the person will not come back. By using concrete words such as "Mummy has died" and giving specific explanations about why the person died can help.

It is important to maintain a routine as normal as possible for the child. It is not unusual for children of this age to revert to younger behaviours such as separation anxiety, incontinence, and use of a security blanket or thumb sucking. Being tolerant and managing the separation will be helpful for the child and the family. In time, it is most likely these earlier behaviour patterns will disappear once 'new normal' family routines are established.

Key Stage 1 – Ages 5 to 7 – Years 1 and 2

Children of this age are beginning to understand that death is permanent; however, some confusion may still stand. When first told of the death, younger children may be mainly concerned with the 'when' and 'where' of the death. They may express concerns about their own future such as: 'What will happen to me? Who will meet me after school? Will I still go to Cubs?' Giving reassurance about everyday activities and arrangements continuing as normal, or clear explanations about alternative arrangements, will be helpful for the child.

Children may become clingy or more reluctant to see parents and carers leave. There may be a need to stick close to their parent to protect them from the mysterious occurrence that made their dad disappear or at least to be with them if it happens again. 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 we feel things like sadness and worry in our bodies too.

They can also feel that in some way they were responsible for the death, e.g. 'I was angry with him and shouted at him when he left for work because he wouldn't fix my bike. I refused to give him a hug. And then he never came home again. It's my fault.' It can be worth saying something like: 'You do know, don't you, that nothing you said or did made this happen?'

Key Stage 2 – Ages 7 to 11 – Years 3, 4, 5 and 6

As children begin to understand more about death and dying, a death in the family may make them anxious about the health and safety of surviving members of the family. They may feel very responsible for their parent(s) and younger siblings and feel the need to keep a close eye on their safety.

Children this age can find it difficult to talk about their bereavement and express their feelings behaviourally, such as withdrawing from others or showing increased aggression. They may experience difficulties in their interactions with their peers, particularly as 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 avoid clichés like "You're being so brave" as children can interpret this as they should not share their feelings. They may need a safe space or quiet area away from peers to calm down or express their emotions with an adult.

Children of this age also show curiosity about 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, factual explanations. Children can also think of death as something spooky, like a zombie, or a spirit that comes to get you. Normalising feelings, talking about or drawing specific worries and sharing bad dreams can be reassuring, giving children skills and confidence to feel more in charge of them.

By the age of 10, children will usually have all of the bits of the jigsaw puzzle of understanding. They will even understand that they are able to cause their own death. They will appreciate clear and detailed information – beyond 'when', 'where' and 'how' the death happened, they will be interested in 'why'.

Key Stage 3 – Ages 11 to 14 – Years 7, 8, and 9

In this age range young people 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. They begin to move away from dependence on the family and they start to form important relationships with other young people, however the death of someone important can easily destabilise them, leaving them feeling unsafe and more dependent on the family. Some older children and teenagers may feel internal conflict as a result of feeling a pull towards being with their peers at the same time as their own need or an expectation that they spend time with their family.

Their ability to manage their feelings may be disrupted and lead to mood swings or more definite up's and down's 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. It is important to find ways to build their self-esteem.

Young people 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. Talking through these future events and exploring ways of including the person can be helpful.

Key Stage 4 and Sixth Form – Ages 14 to 18 – Years 10, 11, 12 and 13

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 their future. Young people 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.

It is quite common for risk-taking behaviour to increase during adolescence as young people test the boundaries. Although an adolescent's thought 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 care and support and to know that the limits you set are still enforced.

As always, if you have any concerns about a young person's safety it is vital you take a pro-active approach and apply your safeguarding policies and procedures.

Appendix J: Talking About Suicide with Students (Headspace)



When a suicide occurs, it is a traumatic event for a school or community and the impact on young people can be significant. Suicide can elicit a range of emotional and behavioural responses.

These will be unique for each individual and will depend on factors such as past experiences, level of support, personality type and how close a student was to the deceased person.

Talking to young people about suicide can feel daunting. Many people fear it will cause increased distress or even lead to the development of suicidal thoughts or suicide 'contagion' (see **headspace** fact sheet on *Suicide Contagion*).

However, talking about suicide in a calm and straightforward way, as well as providing information and support, is actually very important in helping young people to manage their feelings and make sense of what has happened.

It's important to be thoughtful and sensitive when you talk to young people about suicide. The aim is to limit the harmful impact of the death and to promote positive coping strategies and good mental health. Below are some important factors to keep in mind.

1. Give accurate information about why people suicide

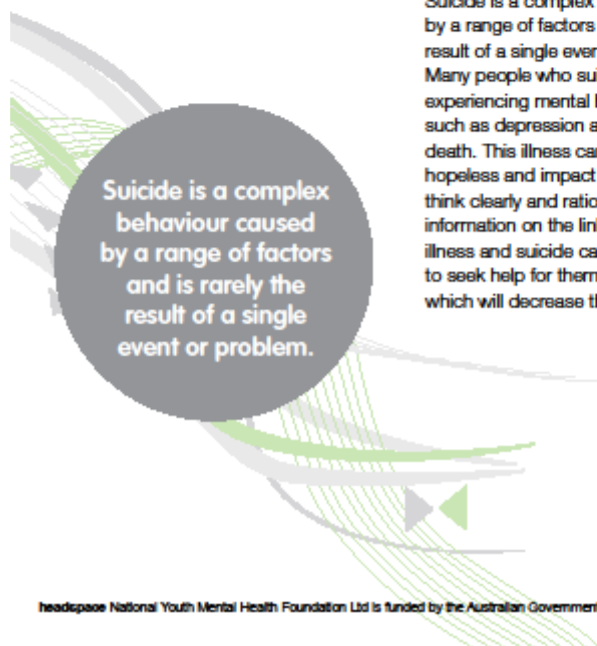
Suicide is a complex behaviour caused by a range of factors and is rarely the result of a single event or problem. Many people who suicide had been experiencing mental health difficulties such as depression at the time of their death. This illness can make people feel hopeless and impact on their ability to think clearly and rationally. Providing information on the link between mental illness and suicide can encourage people to seek help for themselves or others, which will decrease the risk of suicide.

2. Avoid blame

Young people often want answers about why a suicide has occurred, and this can lead to them blaming the death on a particular event or person. Explain that suicide is not simple and is often the result of a range of contributing factors. This can reduce the likelihood that blaming or scapegoating will occur.

3. Don't focus on the method of suicide

Avoid talking graphically or in detail about how the person died. Detailed descriptions of the death can be overwhelming and distressing, and can increase the risk of imitation by vulnerable young people. Keep the focus on how to manage the emotions brought up by the person's death, and away from details of how someone has died.



How to talk about suicide with young people



4. Address feelings such as anger and responsibility

Provide reassurance that a range of responses following a suicide are normal. Young people may feel angry towards the person who died or feel that they could have prevented the death in some way. Such feelings can lead to increased confusion and distress. Reassure them that they are not to blame and that feeling angry doesn't mean they didn't care about the person. Normalising these feelings and allowing young people to talk through their emotional responses can help in the grieving process.

5. Encourage help-seeking

If a young person finds themselves or a friend feeling overwhelmed, unable to cope or developing thoughts of suicide, encourage them to seek help. Let them know what their support options are. This will allow them to choose a person they feel comfortable with and increase the likelihood that they will seek help. Options for support could be a parent or trusted adult, such as a teacher, school counsellor or family doctor.

6. Ask about suicidal thoughts

If you are worried that a young person might be at risk of suicide, it's important to talk to them directly about your concerns in a calm and non-judgemental manner. It can feel uncomfortable asking someone directly about suicidal thoughts or plans, but it's necessary in order to check whether a person is at risk and how imminent that risk is. Asking questions directly can also be a huge relief for a young person struggling with thoughts of suicide. It gives them permission to speak openly about how they are feeling and the opportunity to gain support.

Other fact sheets that may be of interest: *Identifying risk factors and warning signs for suicide, Managing social media following a suicide, Mythbuster: suicidal ideation "Asking young people about suicidal thoughts or behaviours will only put ideas in their heads"*

If you believe that a young person is at risk of suicide, you should seek professional support from your local mental health service or emergency department and keep the young person safe until help arrives.

Remove any means of suicide available to them in the immediate vicinity, such as medications or weapons. Stay with him or her (or arrange for supervision) until they can be seen and assessed.

For more information on suicide or support and assistance visit headspace.org.au/schoolsupport or headspace.org.au

Please refer to the **headspace School Support Suicide Postvention Toolkit – A Guide for Secondary Schools** for further guidance.

Acknowledgements

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Suicide Prevention Resource Centre. (2011). *After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools*, Newton, MA: Education Development Centre, Inc.
 Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. (2011). *LIFE Fact Sheets*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, accessed at www.livinglifeforeveryone.com.au
 South Australia Department of Education and Children's Services, Catholic Education South Australia and Association of Independent Schools. (2010). *Suicide Postvention Guidelines: a framework to assist staff in supporting their school communities in responding to suspected, attempted or completed suicide*. South Australia: Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Children's Services.

Fact sheets are for general information only. They are not intended to be and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific medical or health advice. While every effort is taken to ensure the information is accurate, headspace makes no representations and gives no warranties that this information is correct, current, complete, reliable or suitable for any purpose. We disclaim all responsibility and liability for any direct or indirect loss, damage, cost or expense whatsoever in the use of or reliance upon this information.

Appendix K: Sources of Support for Staff

Onsite Support

- Support offered in your school: staff counselling, support from the Educational Psychologist
- Employee Assistance Programme, [Vivup](#)

Online Support

- **Support After Suicide**
supportaftersuicide.org.uk has been developed with the help of both individuals with experience of suicide and professional bereavement organisations so you can explore practical information and find emotional support if you have been impacted by suicide.
- **Cruse Bereavement Support**
www.cruse.org.uk offer emotional support from grief specialists. Use their online chat service or freephone 0808 808 1677 Monday & Friday 9.30am-5pm, Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 9.30am-8pm, Saturday & Sunday 10am-2pm.
- **Winstons Wish**
www.winstonswish.org A grieving young person who wants to talk to someone, or a parent/carer or professional looking for guidance, can reach out to their bereavement team using one of their confidential on-demand services. If applicable, they can use interpreters over the phone, and the Relay UK app to talk to people with hearing or speech difficulties. Call for free on 08088 020 021 between 8am-8pm, weekdays. Email: ask@winstonswish.org or fill out the contact form for a reply within two working days. Chat online between 3-8pm, weekdays by clicking the blue 'Chat with us' button at the bottom right of your screen. For urgent support, text WW to 85258 to speak with someone from their trusted partner, Shout.
- The website 'At a Loss' provides a range of searchable options for local support: [Bereavement support organisations across the UK \(ataloss.org\)](http://Bereavement support organisations across the UK (ataloss.org))
- **First Hand**
<https://first-hand.org.uk> offers support for anyone affected by witnessing a suicide, when they did not know the person who has died.
- **NHS Every Mind Matters**
www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters offers expert advice and practical tips to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing.

Phone Support

- [Vivup](#) – Confidential Employee Support 24/7, 365 days a year
- Health and Wellbeing Champions – see the Councils intranet <http://insight.eastriding.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/health-champions/>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/advice>
- <https://www.hey mind.org.uk/> 01482 240133
- <https://www.humber.nhs.uk/Services/community-mental-health-services-for-adults-in-the-east-riding.htm>
- NHS Emotional Wellbeing Service - <https://humberews.co.uk/> - or 01482 335451 if with an East Riding GP.
- Let's Talk - www.letstalkhull.co.uk - if registered with a Hull GP.
- East Riding of Yorkshire CCG - <https://www.eastridingofyorkshireccg.nhs.uk/your-health/mentalhealth/> - for help with mental health issues.
- <https://eastridinghealthandwellbeing.co.uk>
- <https://www.nhs-health-trainers.co.uk/>
- Teacher Support Network Tel: 08000 562561 which is a charity for teachers whose aim is to improve the health, wellbeing and status of all teachers (and other employees at schools) by providing support, coaching, counselling, information etc.
- Online MH Support in the form of QWELL <https://www.qwell.io/> which can also be utilised FREE by ERYC employees
 - **Samaritans**
Freephone 116 123 - 24hrs a day, 365 days a year. Support with anything that's troubling you, no matter how big or small the issue is. Samaritans will work through what's on your mind.

Therapeutic Support

- **Health in Mind**
Free courses and therapy for people aged 18 and up, to help with stress, low mood, anxiety and depression: [Health in Mind](#) (NHS service).

Appendix L: Informing students about the unexpected death of a student

NB Ensure permission has been obtained from family to share news before providing staff with the guidance below.

Informing students about the death of a peer is an incredibly difficult task. You are just at the first stage of what may be quite a long process for the other students in Headlands school and yourselves. You can't do everything immediately and yet you may desperately want to do something, after this first shock, which might last for some days, or even weeks, for some of you and your students.

You may have been tasked with informing a group of students. It is ok to show emotion whilst delivering the news. Equally if you need support whilst delivering the news, or you do not feel able to do so, please let Mrs Bone, Headteacher know and support will be provided. It is especially important that we all take care of each other at this time.

If you are aware of any students in your group that had a close relationship with the child who has died, please let Mrs Westcott, Director of Student Services know so that they can be informed separately.

The following points may be helpful at this early stage:

- Informing students in individual classes rather than as a whole school makes it easier to support the most vulnerable students and to make the announcement brief and give plenty of time for students to talk to one another. This way of organising the first stage of school's mourning is more difficult for individual teachers; please do call on colleagues for support.
- It is very important to share only the facts provided by the school Crisis Management Team. It is going to be most helpful to the child's family and friends if every member of staff is telling the same story.
- Explain that we don't have all the answers: *it was a sudden, unexpected death which means that we aren't sure of the details. It is really difficult for all of us to understand that such a sad thing has happened and that we don't have all the answers.*
- Make the announcement brief and give opportunity for students to talk to one another in small, self-selected groups.
- Resist giving a homily in remembrance of the child. There will be a time when such things will be helpful and it will be possible for those who are mourning them to appreciate them and take part in this.
- Avoid, at this stage, telling stories of your own bereavements. Although well intentioned, such stories may leave many students feeling that the particularity of their own grief is being ignored.
- It is probably better with a large group to avoid offering an understanding of the bereavement in terms of your own religious or spiritual beliefs. Although such an offer might be supportive of those who share your belief, it might leave others feeling excluded.
- Some students may ask you the same question repeatedly or ask a question that you have already answered for someone else. This should not be interpreted as pressing you to give more information than you feel able to give, nor is it simple inattention. It is part of the process of disbelief that is a natural response to a death, particularly a shocking one. It is common to go over it again and again as if looking for a clue

that will explain it all, make sense of it all. At this stage, the death is often seen as 'all a mistake'.

- Some students might display what seem to be inappropriate responses. They may fidget, smile, laugh out loud etc. You may find yourself reproofing them more severely than you might wish. Anxiety, confusion, lack of experience and an attempt to avoid the embarrassment of crying may all play a part in these reactions. Letting students see something of your own feelings can help them be more comfortable with letting other people see their feelings.
- Normalise a range of reactions to grief: shock, sadness, anger, numbness etc. Explain that close friends may or may not show signs of grief and those who didn't know them may be deeply affected.
- Ask students to look out for each other, be kind to one another, and let a member of staff know if they are worried about someone.
- Ask students not to share rumours on social media and to be aware that information they read online is likely to be inaccurate.
- Inform students of support room where someone will be available at all times.
- Remind students of the mental health and wellbeing support available in school and explain that there will be some extra support for those who need it.
- Explain that a notice is going home today to inform parents and carers.
- Advise students not to give interviews with the media. Students are not used to dealing with the press, radio or television and if interviewed may say something that they don't really intend to. This may cause unintentional hurt and they may regret something they said later.
- Allow some time to transition from this news back to lesson time.

How to respond to questions if the death cannot be referred to as a suicide

When the reason for a death is uncertain, or the family wish to maintain confidentiality around the cause of death, rumours around a possible suicide may circulate.

- Keep information clear and consistent; share only the facts provided by the school Crisis Management Team.
- If a group is asking about suicide / sharing rumours, address the rumours and stick to the facts, for example:

'We have heard students wondering about whether (student's name) died by suicide. (His/her/their) family have chosen to keep how (she/he/they) died private and the school will be respecting their wishes regarding this. We ask you to respect their wishes, too. But given the subject has come up, there is some important information about suicide that we would like to discuss.'

- This opens the door to discuss mental illness, grief reactions and help-seeking. These conversations help to reduce stigma and encourage students to talk with an appropriate person to seek support for themselves or a peer, while still respecting the family's decision to not refer to the death as a suicide.
- If a student or parent / carer asks if the death was a suicide the response you give will depend on your assessment of individual circumstances:
 - It might be sufficient to simply respond that the person died suddenly or unexpectedly.

- You might gently contain questioning by informing them that the family have chosen to keep how the student died private and the school will be respecting their wishes regarding this.
- If the person is distressed and seeking answers, a more detailed response may be required, for example:

'I understand that you want to make sense of how (student's name) died, and it is normal to want to know and understand, but the family have chosen to keep how (she/he/they) died private and the school will be respecting their wishes regarding this. It's okay to be upset at the moment and I want to help you as best I can.'

- In cases where a student / parent / carer is distressed, keep a record as per your usual record keeping processes, and inform a member of the school Crisis Management Team. Wellbeing staff can then support the individual's responses and feelings to suspecting or believing that the person died by suicide, in a safe and confidential space, without breaching confidentiality.

Thank you for providing such valuable support to our students at this time.



Author: Child Bereavement UK © Child Bereavement UK

Supporting bereaved children and young people with special educational needs

childbereavementuk.org/information-bereaved-children-with-special-needs

All children and young people, regardless of their circumstances, have a right to have their grief recognised, to hear the truth and to be given opportunities to express their feelings and emotions. Those with additional needs are no different but may need extra help with their understanding and ways to express feelings. Whilst we may not know exactly what a child or a young person with profound and multiple learning disabilities understands when someone significant dies, they will certainly be aware of that person's absence and of the changes in their own life that may result.

Helping children with additional needs deal with their grief may present teachers, parents and carers with specific challenges. The child's understanding may be at the level of a much younger child and they may have little sense of the permanence of death. Some children may never come to a complete understanding of the finality of death and may continue to believe that the dead person will return one day. They may long for things to be the same as they were.

Preparing for a death

If the death is expected, it can be helpful to prepare the child in advance in a gradual way. The child may need to be prepared for visits to a hospice or hospital. It helps if the child can be told about any changes they might see, such as how the ill person might look or sound or for any changes in their day to day activities and routines that might happen.

- Keep to normal daily routines as much as possible - many children and young people with learning difficulties find any change difficult to manage.
- Use clear, concrete language, avoiding euphemisms and abstract ideas.
- Explain any predicted changes in routine in advance, giving details about who will be doing what and when.
- Use pictures and photographs to explain what will happen at any visits to a hospital or hospice.

After a death

When a death has occurred, the child may need help in understanding the concept of death as well as needing opportunities to express their grief.

Answer any questions as they arise honestly and using simple language, at a level appropriate to the child's understanding. Give enough information to answer the question, but without adding a confusing amount of detail. You may need to repeat your answer many times, so try to use consistent language and explanations.

Use lots of examples to explain the non-reversibility of death, but in a way appropriate to the child's understanding. Where possible, use pictures and real objects. Try to take a biological approach that is practical, clear, and visual, with concrete examples, such as comparing a dead fish with a live fish, observing flowers wilting and dying. See below for some ideas on how to do this.

Try to include the child in rituals, such as sending cards or attending the funeral or memorial service. Children with additional needs are sometimes excluded as it is challenging for the adults around them, or there may be the belief that the child won't understand what is happening. However, being included in these events can be extremely helpful for children and can aid their understanding of what is happening. There may be ways to enable their participation such as having another adult to care for them during the service or there might be parts of it that they could be present for. However, if this is not possible, make sure that they are given an opportunity to say goodbye with their own simple ceremony.

Prepare the child for events such as funerals or memorial ceremonies. It may be helpful to visit the place where the service will take place beforehand or to make a multisensory or social story using photographs with accompanying text that will explain what will happen. See Resources section for sources of guidance about sensory and social stories.

Explain and prepare for any changes to daily routines in advance, giving details about who will be doing what and when. It can be very reassuring for children to know who will be taking them to school or to activities if this has changed.

Communicating the Truth

It is sometimes assumed that children with additional difficulties need more protection from hearing about death and dying than other children, or that they do not have the capacity to understand. However, whilst their understanding may be that typical of a younger age, we often underestimate their abilities to cope with the tough things in life. The challenge is to find creative ways to communicate when words are sometimes not appropriate.

It is important to acknowledge the death. To ignore what has happened suggests that this is an unimportant event and denies the existence of the person who has died.

If using words, use the real ones, for example, 'dead' and 'dying', not euphemisms. If the child communicates using signs or symbols, ensure you have the correct vocabulary to hand.

Understanding the concept of death

All children struggle with the concept of death and its permanence. Children with learning difficulties may find this particularly hard to grasp and will benefit from simple, practical examples to illustrate the difference between dead and living things. Very visual explanations are particularly important for children with autism spectrum disorders.

Here are some ideas to help with understanding:

Buy a bunch of flowers, put them in a vase and observe them wilt, wither, and die. Compare them to a fresh bunch of the same type. If kept, the dead flowers will illustrate that death is permanent and that the flowers do not return to life.

Purchase a dead fish from the supermarket and compare it to a live one. Even when put into a bowl of water the dead one will not move, breath, eat or swim.

Give the dead fish a burial that replicates as far as possible a real one. You can explain a cremation by burning leaves and mixing the resulting ashes with some earth.

Take photographs of the above activities and put these into a book. This will act as a visual reminder for the many times when the explanation will need to be repeated.

Use as many real-life examples as you can, such as pictures of funerals and coffins to aid understanding.

Visiting the dead body will help with the concept of no life, but this will need careful preparation, so the child knows exactly what to expect. Feeling that the body is cold and observing no breathing or movement can aid their understanding that the body is no longer working.

Expressing their grief

Children do not need protection from the feelings and emotions associated with grief, but support to express them and reassurance that these sometimes powerful and overwhelming emotions are normal and necessary. This is even more the case for children with learning difficulties.

Help the child to learn how to recognise different feelings both in themselves and others, as well as learning appropriate ways of expressing their feelings. You can do this by using everyday situations and events to point out different emotions in other people (for example on TV programmes, in magazines and stories) using consistent and simple language to label emotions from the child's own experiences and by using pictures.

Remember that children will take their cue from the adults around them, so it is helpful if you can be honest about your own emotions and to sometimes shed tears if you need to, but to also reassure the child that you are OK and that your response is natural.

Use a simple workbook such as 'When Someone Very Special Dies' by Marge Heegard (see Resources section). This can easily be adapted for various ability levels.

Looking at photographs or watching videos of the person who has died can facilitate expressions of sadness or anger.

Carrying a comfort object such as a small piece of warm furry blanket can be an aid in getting through difficult moments.

Offer opportunities for safe ways to express frustration and anger, such as physical activities, music-making, or creating a 'scream box' (a box stuffed with paper and a cardboard tube to shout into). Give reassurance that it is OK to be angry.

Remembering the person who has died

When someone important to a child or young person dies, memories are an important part of the grief process. Whilst the person may be physically gone from the child's life, the emotional bond will still be there. This is particularly true when a parent or carer dies and children with additional needs often have a number of adults in caring roles, so will be affected by the death of any one of them. Memories help any child to construct a sense of who it is they are grieving for and why. It is, therefore, important to help make this happen for children with additional needs.

Ways to remember a person who has died might include:

Having a piece of fabric from an item of clothing worn by the person who has died, to carry in a pocket or made into a cushion, which can be comforting.

Having the perfume or aftershave of the person who has died on a hanky can be reassuring.

Put together a memory box of tangible reminders chosen by the child that are of particular relevance to them. Try to keep in mind the importance of concrete reminders of the person that has died and include something relating to all five senses. A memory box therefore might include pictures of the person, pictures of things that person enjoyed, a small object that belonged to the person, a piece of fabric that is associated with that person (that may have a particular 'feel' to it), a CD of music that the person enjoyed or tape of them speaking, something that reminds the child of the smell of that person (such as perfume, aftershave, toothpaste or deodorant).

Listening to audio tapes of the voice or favourite music of the person who has died may be familiar and comforting.

Use photographs and memories of significant events to create timeline and story of that person's life.

Keep in mind that the needs of bereaved children with additional difficulties are the same as those of any child but ensuring they receive appropriate support and understanding may require some additional thought and preparation from the adults caring for them.

Click on the icons below to generate a print-friendly version of this page, or to create a PDF of the content:

Appendix N: Letter Templates for Informing Parents and Carers about an Unexpected Death

Example: Amend names and wording as appropriate to the specific circumstances.

Dear Parents and Carers,

It is with great sadness that I write to inform you of the sudden and unexpected death of a student that attended our school. The police have let us know that there are no suspicious circumstances and the coroner's officer has been informed.

I know that the thoughts of our whole school community will be with the student's family and friends. The death of a child is a terrible shock and affects us all in many different ways. With the help of the Local Authority and specialist services, we are providing support for students and staff at this difficult time. If you think there is further information we need to be aware of that will help us support your child, please let individual Year teams know.

Be aware that your child may wish to talk about this. If they do, we ask that you are open and listen to them. I have highlighted some additional support networks and numbers below that you may find useful, if you are worried about the wellbeing of your own child as a result of this news.

It is understandable to want to know more about such a tragic event. With respect for the family, we are not sharing details at this time. As a school community it is important that we now take time to look after all those that have been affected.

Best wishes,

Headteacher

Links to Support Networks

- Add school in-house support or appropriate services available in your area
- **E-Wellbeing:** a digital wellbeing service for young people. Has a module on grief www.e-wellbeing.co.uk/modules/grief
- **Winstons Wish:** childhood bereavement charity www.winstonswish.org call: **08088 202 021**
- **Samaritans:** 24 hour listening support. Call: **116 123** email: jo@samaritans.org
- **SANEline:** help, support and information to anyone affected by mental health. Call: **0300 304 7000** email: sanemail@sane.org.uk
- **Childline:** Free and confidential help for young people in the UK www.childline.org.uk call: **0800 1111**
- **Young Minds:** free text messaging support for young people. Text YM to **58258**
- **Hub of Hope:** mental health support database www.hubofhope.co.uk

Example letter following sudden and unexpected death of a student in school community - 1 week on

Amend as appropriate.

Dear Parents, Carers and Students,

It has been a difficult week for our school community, as we try to come to terms with the sudden and unexpected death of [name].

[Name] was well known at school and had a close group of friends, who will miss him/her/them dearly. [He/she/they was/were] an active member of the school community: add personal details...]

With the consent of [his/her/their] family we will be giving students and staff the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings, through a memorial book, that we will place [add places]. Room(s) will be available at; break, lunchtime and after school, for students to have time and space to reflect and write a note or memory if they wish. The books will then be given to [name's] family.

It has been a sad time, but I am very proud of the way students and staff have supported each other through this. We must continue to look after each other over the coming weeks and ask that [name's] family's request for privacy to be respected.

Best wishes,

Headteacher

Links to Support Networks

- Add school in-house support or appropriate services available in your area
- **E-Wellbeing:** a digital wellbeing service for young people. Has a module on grief
www.e-wellbeing.co.uk/modules/grief
- **Winstons Wish:** childhood bereavement charity www.winstonswish.org call: **08088 202 021**
- **Samaritans:** 24 hour listening support. Call: **116 123** email: jo@samaritans.org
- **SANEline:** help, support and information to anyone affected by mental health. Call: **0300 304 7000** email: sanemail@sane.org.uk
- **Childline:** Free and confidential help for young people in the UK
www.childline.org.uk call: **0800 1111**
- **Young Minds:** free text messaging support for young people. Text YM to **58258**
- **Hub of Hope:** mental health support database www.hubofhope.co.uk

Example letter following sudden and unexpected death of a student in school community - 2 weeks on

Amend text as appropriate to the specific circumstances.

Dear Parents and Carers,

Thank you for all your kind messages of support following the news I shared about the sudden and unexpected death, of [name].

During the last week students have been able to access support from our own Wellbeing Team and also from the Local Authority. We have had a range of professionals supporting us in school including; [the school nurse, primary mental health practitioners and educational psychologists. We have also been working with (specify community group/charity etc) to support our work in developing a longer-term approach, in supporting parents/carers, students and staff. As part of this we will be planning a parent/carer evening focused on sharing information, advice and guidance on mental health and wellbeing. I will confirm the date (specify e.g., when we return after the half term break)].

The memorial books will remain open until [date] for both students and staff to share a thought or write a memory. The books will then be given to [name's] family to show how much [name] was cared for.

To reinforce the support available at school, and in the holidays, we have produced cards for all students, parents and carers highlighting where they can access help or support. [Clarify what support is available in school].

As I mentioned in my previous letter, I am incredibly proud of the way both students and staff have supported each other, during this difficult time.

Best wishes,

Headteacher

Links to Support Networks

- Add school in-house support or appropriate services available in your area
- **E-Wellbeing:** a digital wellbeing service for young people. Has a module on grief www.e-wellbeing.co.uk/modules/grief
- **Winstons Wish:** childhood bereavement charity www.winstonswish.org call: **08088 202 021**
- **Samaritans:** 24 hour listening support. Call: **116 123** email: jo@samaritans.org
- **SANEline:** help, support and information to anyone affected by mental health. Call: **0300 304 7000** email: sanemail@sane.org.uk
- **Childline:** Free and confidential help for young people in the UK www.childline.org.uk call: **0800 1111**
- **Young Minds:** free text messaging support for young people. Text YM to **58258**
- **Hub of Hope:** mental health support database www.hubofhope.co.uk



You will have been made aware that a suicide has occurred at your child's school.

This is a very sad and traumatic event for all students, school staff, parents and the wider school community. Below is some information that may be helpful in assisting you and your child to manage during this difficult time.

Young people respond to suicide in unique ways, and a wide range of reactions is possible

Your child's response will be influenced by their personality, their relationship with the deceased person, what is happening in their life and their ability to adjust to change.

Whatever age your child is they will need to find safe ways of expressing their feelings. They may feel:

- confusion
- anger
- aggression
- withdrawal
- fear
- guilt
- denial
- blame
- betrayal
- abandonment
- hurt
- sadness.

Parental understanding, reassurance and attention are very important at this time.

Be guided by your child's need to talk, and make it clear to them that you will be available whenever they need you.

Young people who have experienced other stressful situations in their lives may find it harder to cope

These experiences may include the separation/divorce of parents, the death of a relative/pet and moving house/school. They may become upset and need to express their feelings about these other concerns, even if they had appeared to be coping. If your child is already using the services of a psychologist or psychiatrist, make them aware of the suicide.

Your child may have a lot of questions

They may want to know exactly what happened. The school will have provided your child with information about the incident. Details about the way a suicide occurred will not be given to students, as this information is potentially harmful to their wellbeing. As parents, it is important to steer discussion towards the positive "help-seeking" actions which young people can take. This includes talking to a trusted adult, such as a parent, counsellor, teacher, relative or friend.

Whatever age your child is they will need to find safe ways of expressing their feelings.

Suicide in schools: Information for parents

headspace.org.au



“Tell an adult if you are worried about a friend”

This is an important message to share with your child, in any discussion about suicide. Adolescents sometimes share their feelings about death with friends – in conversations, letters, emails, text messages and on the internet. If they suspect a friend may be about to hurt themselves, they should tell an adult immediately.

Be aware that you or your child may be affected by the media’s responses to the event

You may decide to protect your family against certain coverage. You may choose to watch the news together, so you can discuss any concerns that are raised and ensure your child feels supported. Hopefully, media reporting of specific youth suicides will not occur. However, if it does, be aware that it can contribute to young people’s vulnerability.

Some reactions can happen weeks, months or a year after an event

If you are concerned about your child’s reaction and behaviour (such as changes in their socialising or school work), it is important to speak to the principal or student counsellor at their school or a GP. This may result in a referral to a counsellor for a mental health and/or risk assessment.

Be aware that school staff will also be affected

While everyone will be working towards normalising school routines, some staff will be managing difficult emotions. Through the Department of Education and other relevant bodies adult counselling support is available to all school staff through a process outside the school.

Respond to community concern with respect

When you speak with other members of the community, reinforce that the best approach is to:

- Respect the bereaved/affected family;
- Avoid glamorising/sensationalising suicide; and
- Encourage help-seeking actions in young people.

Young people should also encourage help-seeking in any friends they have concerns about.

Where can parents and young people get more information and help?

headspace centres provide support, information and advice to young people aged 12 to 25. For locations and other information, go to headspace.org.au

headspace School Support is a service which supports schools following a suicide. More information is available on the **headspace** School Support website headspace.org.au/schoolsupport

eheadspace provides online counselling and telephone support to young people aged 12 to 25. Its services are available at eheadspace.org.au and on **1800 650 890**

Other resources

beyondblue’s youth program, Youthbeyondblue, promotes the message that it’s acceptable to talk about depression. It encourages young people, their families and friends to look out for each other and to get help when it is needed. A set of youth fact sheets can be downloaded from youthbeyondblue.com

Reach Out! is a web based service that encourages young people to help themselves through tough times. The service aims to improve young people’s mental health and wellbeing by providing support, information and referrals in a format designed for young people. You can find them at au.reachout.com

Kids Helpline is a 24-hour telephone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25. They be contacted on **1800 55 1800** and at kidshelpline.com.au.

Lifeline (**13 11 14**) is a 24-hour telephone counselling service. lifeline.org.au has other online information and referral services.

Acknowledgements:

South Australia Department of Education and Children’s Services, Catholic Education South Australia and Association of Independent Schools. (2010). Suicide Prevention Guidelines: a framework to assist staff in supporting their school communities in responding to suspected, attempted or completed suicide. South Australia: Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Children’s Services.

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Appendix P: A Guide to Dealing with the Media Following an Unexpected Death

Some Do's and Don'ts

- Do contact the Council's Corporate Communications Team who will advise on the content and presentation of a statement and management of the press in general.
- Do prepare a brief press statement which can be read and handed out to reporters (see below for template).
- Prepare some positive comments about any person (student or staff) who has died, and expressions of sympathy for the bereaved family.
- Do use careful and sensitive language (see [Appendix Q - Suicide Language Guidelines](#) for guidance around talking about suicide).
- Do keep it short.
- Do regard everything as recorded and quotable (generally the media will).
- Do ask whether there will be the possibility of editing the interview.
- Do ask in advance for an outline of the questions that you will be asked.
- Do make a note of what is asked and your reply.
- Do stick to the facts.
- Do avoid sweeping statements and generalisations.
- Do avoid being drawn into speculation - if you do not know, be clear about this.
- Do try to work co-operatively with the press - if they are given regular authoritative bulletins about the situation, they will be less likely to report local rumours and gossip.
- Do get back as promised without undue delay. If you exceed a deadline, the story may be printed without your input, giving an unfortunate slant and maybe creating further problems. For example, it may be reported that you were "unavailable for, or refused to, comment" which can give a bad impression.
- Do put a time-scale on the interview, firmly but politely, if needs be.
- Don't go into personal details of those involved.
- Don't read the statement to the camera.
- Don't engage in rambling discussions afterwards.
- Don't use "No Comment".
- Don't respond to "quotes" from others.
- Don't answer questions you don't know the answer to.
- Don't make 'off-the-record' comments.
- Don't answer "yes" or "no" to a long question which may then be interpreted in a negative way. Clarify the issue and reply with a short statement giving your message.

Frequently Asked Questions in Dealing with the Media

Q. I (the Headteacher) am being asked for an interview. How do I respond?

A. If you do not feel comfortable being interviewed it is acceptable to refuse. If you are willing to be interviewed, you should rehearse what to say. Writing a media statement may be helpful (see template below). The language used should be careful and sensitive. It should state the facts about what has happened, and refer to the upset/distress/sorrow in the school. It should express the school's sympathy to the bereaved family. An outline of the supports that have been put in place for the students, staff and parents should be given. Ideally, this statement should not be read to camera.

Q. What about the actual interview?

A. Interviews should be kept short; avoid making sweeping statements and generalisations; avoid being drawn into speculation; don't use "no comment" as it can sound unhelpful and defensive. Don't respond to "quotes" from others. If asked a question you don't know the answer to, it is important that you say so. Make no 'off-the-record' comments and remember that everything is quotable. An unguarded remark may be broadcast many times and may cause distress. Ask the media for an outline of the questions that you will be asked and whether there will be the possibility of editing the interview. Media personnel can be very helpful about this if the underlying concern is clear.

Q. How do I respond if the media are seeking to interview students?

A. It is important that only one person from the school is nominated as the media spokesperson. In general the Headteacher takes this role. The Headteacher should advise staff and students that there is one media spokesperson and only that person will liaise with the media. It will therefore not be necessary for any students or staff to give interviews. The Headteacher should mention that students are not used to dealing with the press, radio or television and if interviewed may say something that they don't really intend to. This may cause unintentional hurt and they may regret something they said later.

Q. How do I respond if the press ask me or students for pictures of the deceased/injured?

A. The press may ask for pictures of the injured or deceased for publication. The provision of pictures is the sole decision of the bereaved/affected family. It is important to advise staff and students to respect this.

Q. TV stations, radio programmes and newspapers are calling the school requesting interviews. How do I advise the school to handle this?

A. Draft a media statement, (see below). Advise the secretary that when calls are received from the media, their email address should be taken and a copy of the media statement should be sent to them. Advise them of the venue and timing of any media briefing if this has been arranged.

Q. How do I respond if I don't know the answer to a question?

A. If you cannot answer a question it may be helpful to side-step it, saying something like "I cannot comment further as I have not discussed this with my colleagues", then offer a point that you can make with confidence. Listen to the media approach, say you'll check some details and give a time when you will get back to the journalist.

Find out if they have a deadline. Prepare material with a facts/figures slant, based on accessible evidence. Always give some response.

Sample Announcement to the Media

This can be used as a template by schools to be emailed, posted on the setting's social media site or given to the media. It may help to decrease the number of media calls. In some instances it is not appropriate to provide names or information that might identify individuals. Ensure the statement is shared with the family before it is shared with the press. This announcement will need to be changed based upon confidentiality issues, the wishes of the victim's family and the nature of the incident.

My name is (Name) and I am the Headteacher of (Name) school. We learned this morning of the death of (one of our students or Name of student). This is a terrible tragedy for _____ family(ies), our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with (Name's) family and friends. (Name of student) was a (year 10 student) and will be greatly missed by all who knew (her/him/them). We have been in contact with (his/her/their) family and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time. Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated.

With the help of the Local Authority and specialist services, we are providing support for students and staff at this difficult time. The teachers have been helping students to deal with the tragic event. The school has been open to parents and carers to support them and to offer them advice and guidance. We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time.

Thank you.

camh

Words matter.

Learning how to talk about suicide in a hopeful, respectful way has the power to save lives.

01 / Language Guidelines

The topic of suicide should be approached with care and compassion. Whether we are engaging in a dialogue, talking to someone with lived experience or writing about the issue in a professional setting, being mindful of our language is not just about being politically correct. It's about saving lives.

As our knowledge and understanding of suicide evolves, the way we talk about it must evolve as well. To help you be more conscious of your own language decisions, this guide will show you how to avoid reinforcing the stigma that prevents people from seeking help when they need it most.

While there are specific terms and phrases to avoid when speaking about suicide and mental illness, the general rules below can help you choose your words more carefully.

Avoid:

- ◆ Anything that reinforces stereotypes, prejudice or discrimination against people with mental illness and suicidal ideation
- ◆ Anything that implies mental illness makes people more creative, fragile or violent
- ◆ Anything that refers to or defines people by their diagnosis

Choosing our words carefully is about more than avoiding stigmatizing terms. The language we use can also have a positive effect, which makes choosing the right words just as important as avoiding the wrong ones.

- ◆ Be direct. We know that talking to someone about suicide won't cause or increase suicidal thoughts, or cause the person to act on them. It can help them feel less isolated and scared.
- ◆ Be hopeful. People can and do get better.
- ◆ Encourage people to seek help.

02 / Language Guidelines

INSTEAD OF THIS...	...SAY THIS	WHY
commit/committed suicide	died by suicide / death by suicide / lost their life to suicide	<p>"commit" implies suicide is a sin or crime, reinforcing the stigma that it's a selfish act and personal choice</p> <p>using neutral phrasing like "died by suicide" helps strip away the shame/blame element</p>
successful/unsuccessful suicide completed/failed suicide	<p>died by suicide / survived a suicide attempt / lived through a suicide attempt</p> <p>fatal suicidal behaviour / non-fatal suicidal behaviour</p> <p>fatal suicide attempt / non-fatal suicide attempt</p>	<p>the notion of a "successful" suicide is inappropriate because it frames a very tragic outcome as an achievement or something positive</p> <p>to be matter-of-fact, a suicide attempt is either fatal or not</p>
epidemic, skyrocketing	rising, increasing	<p>words like "epidemic" can spark panic, making suicide seem inevitable or more common than it actually is</p> <p>by using purely quantitative, less emotionally charged terms like "rising", we can avoid instilling a sense of doom or hopelessness</p>
<Name> is suicidal	<Name> is facing suicide / is thinking of suicide / has suffered through suicidal thoughts / has experienced suicidal thoughts	we don't want to define someone by their experience with suicide; they are more than their suicidal thoughts
He's suicidal They're a schizophrenic She's bipolar The mentally ill <Substance> addicts	<p>he is facing suicide / thinking of suicide / experiencing suicidal thoughts</p> <p>they have schizophrenia / are living with schizophrenia</p> <p>people with mental illness</p> <p>people addicted to <substance>, people with addiction</p>	<p>putting the condition before the person reduces someone's identity to their diagnosis—people aren't their illness; they have an illness</p> <p>people-first language shows respect for the individual, reinforcing the fact that their condition does not define them</p>

These recommendations have been informed by the Canadian Psychiatric Association's *Media Guidelines for Reporting on Suicide*.

Together, we can change the way the world perceives and treats people facing suicide.

The unfortunate reality is that many stigmatizing phrases and ways of talking about suicide have been ingrained into our vocabulary. Even the most dedicated supporters of the mental health movement may find themselves slipping up from time to time, and that's okay. This does not make you a bad person—it makes you human.

If you catch yourself using problematic language about suicide or mental illness, correct yourself out loud. By letting those around you know why your words were harmful, you can turn the conversation into a positive learning experience for everyone involved. If we all put in this effort, we will see a fundamental shift in the way society addresses these issues.

Appendix R: What is a Joint Agency Response?



What is a Joint Agency Response?

It is the responsibility of Child Death Review Partners (Local Authorities and CCG's) to ensure arrangements for the review of each child that dies who is normally resident in their area.

A Joint Agency Response is a process for reviewing child deaths whereby a team of key professionals come together for the purpose of enquiring into and evaluating each unexpected¹ death of a child. Meetings held throughout the JAR are mandated under the [Sussex Joint Agency Response protocol for Unexpected Deaths procedures](#) in accordance with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, Chapter 5.

A Joint Agency Response will be triggered if a child's death:

- Is or could be due to external causes;
- Is sudden and there is no immediately apparent cause of death (incl. SUDC);
- Occurs in custody, or where the child was detained under the Mental Health Act;
- Where the initial circumstances raise any suspicions that the death may not have been natural;
- In the case of a stillbirth where no healthcare professional was in attendance, and
- If a child is brought to hospital, near death and is successfully resuscitated but is expected to die in the following days.

What is the Initial Information Sharing and Planning Meeting (IISPM)?

It is a multi-agency meeting held following the death of a child (usually by the next working day) where a Joint Agency Response is required. This is jointly planned by the Senior Investigating Officer, Lead Health Professional and Children's Social Care. This meeting will be arranged and chaired by Children's Social Care where the child was resident.

Multi-agency professionals and specialist agencies that have been involved with the child/family will be requested to attend. Some agencies may not have known the child in life. Those who may be invited, in addition to lead health professional, investigating officer and children's social care include:

- General Practitioner
- Midwife
- Health Visitor/School Nurse
- Police Coroners Officer
- Hospital staff during the resuscitation
- Ambulance crew
- Other doctors or AHP caring for the child in life
- Education

What is the Purpose of the Initial Information Sharing and Planning Meeting (IISPM)?

The purpose of this early meeting is to share and discuss pertinent information agencies hold in relation to the death of a child;

- Consider the possible causes of death, ascertain if there are any safeguarding concerns
- Plan future care and support of the family, including who will provide the family with information about support groups, bereavement, etc.
- Identify support for the child's immediate and extended peer groups and professionals
- Identify any immediate learning to be shared
- Share information from each agency's previous knowledge of the family and records. In particular any reference to the circumstances of the child's death; previous or ongoing child protection concerns, previous unexplained or unusual deaths in the family; neglect, failure to thrive, parental substance abuse, mental illness or domestic violence. Information is also required about family members and others involved with the child. Evidence of good care and parenting is also sought.

¹ Unexpected death refers to the death of a child (less than 18 years of age) that was not anticipated as a significant possibility 24 hours before the death or where there was an unexpected collapse leading to or precipitating events that led to the death.

- Enable consideration of any child protection risks to siblings/any other children living in the household and to consider the need for child protection procedures and any other action, for example health overview for other children in the family.
- Agree whether a follow-up meeting should be held (usually after the final post mortem examination report is available and permission to share the result has been given by the coroner)
- Identify a plan to convene for a final case review (CDRM) ideally before a coroner's inquest (in required);
- Identify any other actions that may be necessary
- Agree whether a referral should be made to the child safeguarding partnerships for consideration of a rapid review

The agreed meeting minutes will be shared with Pan-Sussex Child Death Overview Panel to inform their independent review, the relevant Coroner and the Pathologist for potential investigations.

Expectations for attendees at an IISPM

- All attendees are expected to engage and provide information that is held about the child and family.
- Attendees should be prepared and aware prior to attending an IISPM that sensitive confidential information will be shared which could be very distressing and have an emotional impact if you have known the child in life.
- Discussions may be held in respect of historical information, Social Care information, events leading to the death and the health care provided to the child such as:
 - Injuries to the child (intentional or non-intentional).
 - Emergency medical intervention provided to the child.
 - Accounts of events leading to the death of the child.
 - Potential Police investigations.
 - Environment in which the child may have been found.
- Dependant on circumstances, there will be a pre-meeting with medical staff and initial responders to discuss specific circumstances surrounding the death and clinical details that may not be appropriate for open discussions. Nursery/Schools etc will not be invited to this pre-meeting however a sanitised overview will be provided to all attendees of the IISPM.
- The information shared at the IISPM and the minutes are strictly confidential and should only be shared within your organisation on a need to know basis. The information shared and the meeting minutes must not be shared outside of your organisation without prior consent from the chair or CDR Partnership (LA and CCG) and those sharing the information. Please ensure the information and meeting minutes are stored in line with your organisations Data Protection and Confidentiality procedures.

Steps following the IISPM

Dependant on what actions arise from the death, there may be requests for further information from agencies who are tasked with reviewing/investigating the death.

- In some circumstances, a subsequent follow-up IISPM meeting may be required; this will be arranged by Children's Social Care to discuss any emerging/new information.
- In accordance with The Children Act 2004, Child Death Overview Panels were established to conduct reviews for all child deaths, regardless of the cause. Agencies who hold information pertinent to the care or death will be required to complete a 'CDOP Reporting Form' to document their services input and allow for thorough analysis. All information collected by CDOP's are shared with the National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) for interpretation and analysis on all child deaths across England. There is a legal requirement for organisations to comply with this request.
- If the death is referred to the child safeguarding partnerships for consideration of a rapid review – agencies may be required to complete an information request.
- Once the final Post Mortem Examination report is available and any necessary information, such as outcomes from any investigations have returned. Professionals who have been involved with the child/family should be invited to attend a Child Death Review Meeting. This will be the final meeting of the JAR process and held before a coronial inquest. At this meeting, professionals will review all information in order to clarify the likely cause of death, identify whether there were any contributory or modifiable factors, describe any learning from organisations involved and review the support needs of the family. The minutes from this meeting will be sent to the coroner and to the CDOP.

Appendix S: Suicide Contagion (Headspace)



Suicide contagion refers to the process whereby one suicide or suicidal act within a school, community or geographic area increases the likelihood that others will attempt or die by suicide.

Suicide contagion can lead to a suicide cluster, where a number of connected suicides occur following an initial death. While it's a rare phenomenon, young people seem to be more vulnerable to suicide contagion than older people.

This may be because young people identify more strongly with the actions of their peers, and because adolescence is a period of increased vulnerability to mental health problems, which in turn can increase the risk of suicide.

Factors that contribute to suicide contagion

One of the factors thought to contribute to suicide contagion is the glamorising or romanticising of suicide that can occur in the process of communicating about a suicide death. This refers to actions or messages that may inadvertently make suicide seem desirable to other vulnerable young people.

It's common for people to remember the positive things about someone who has recently died and to focus less on the difficulties they may have been having prior to their death. While this may be well-meaning, it has the potential to encourage suicidal thoughts and behaviour in other vulnerable young people. Care needs to be taken not to give the impression that suicide was a positive outcome for the young person.

Contagion is also more likely when observers identify with the deceased, so oversimplified messages about why someone suicided should be avoided. Such messages may contribute to other vulnerable young people's increased identification with the deceased person.

Who is at risk of suicide contagion?

The Circles of Vulnerability model can help determine the degree of emotional impact a death by suicide has on members of the school community. In particular it highlights that individuals most at risk of suicide contagion are those geographically, socially and psychologically close to the deceased. People already experiencing risk factors for suicide are also at increased risk of suicide contagion.

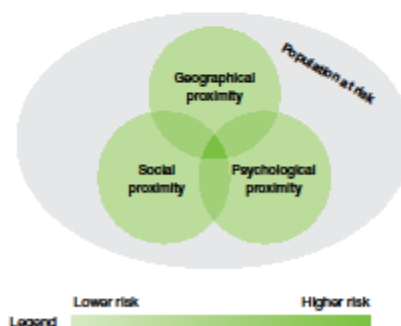
Below is a visual representation of the Circles of Vulnerability model. This may be helpful

in identifying vulnerable individuals in the school community following a suicide.

Population at Risk

A wide range of biological, psychological and social factors are associated with an increased risk of suicide including:

- Experiencing mental health and/or drug and alcohol problems
- A past suicide attempt
- Experiencing family difficulties or violence, or family history of suicide
- Loss of a friend or family member
- Social and geographical isolation
- Being male; males have a statistically higher risk than females.



Circles of Vulnerability model adapted from Rossnfeld, Ceylan, Ayelein & Lahad (2005); cited at Together To Live, Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health

Suicide Contagion



Who is at risk of suicide contagion? (continued)

Geographical proximity

People who have witnessed the death, were exposed to it, or had contact with the person shortly before they died are more at risk of contemplating suicide. Suicide contagion can also occur via the internet, mobile phones and the mass media. Social media can substantially broaden the exposure and impact of the suicide.

Psychological proximity

People who relate to the deceased through cultural connections, shared experiences (eg victims of bullying, classmates) or perceive themselves to be similar to the deceased in some way, are also at greater risk of contemplating suicide.

Social proximity

The relationship someone had with the deceased, including family, friends, social circles and romantic partners is the final aspect of the Circles of Vulnerability model to consider. In particular, it is about how close a young person feels towards the deceased. Even if they don't appear to have had a relationship with the person who died, a young person's perception of closeness (e.g. feeling close to the person because they travelled on the bus together for years, even if they never spoke) has been found to significantly influence their level of risk.

For more information see [headspace School Support fact sheet Identifying risk factors and warning signs for suicide](#).

Tips for reducing the risk of suicide contagion in a school or community

- Provide clear and accurate information immediately. Do not provide unnecessary detail and ensure information is age and culturally appropriate.
- Provide information individually or in appropriate friendship groups to close friends and family. After they have been notified, information should be provided to naturally occurring groups such as homeroom or first period classes.
- Identify and monitor people at increased risk.
- Provide appropriate support and treatment for people at risk, including initial one to one support for distressed students.
- Provide permission and a safe place for young people to talk about their feelings, understand their reactions and discuss helpful coping strategies to help to reduce distress. Talking to young people about suicide will not put the idea into their minds – if a suicide has occurred amongst their friends or peers, young people will probably already be thinking about it. Appropriate discussions regarding mental health and suicide can help to reduce the risk of suicide contagion.

- Advise students that there is professional help available for mental health problems and suicidal thoughts in the school and in the community.
- Encourage appropriate reporting of suicide in the media (see [fact sheet Responding to the media](#)). Encourage students not to talk to the media and to refer media enquiries to an appropriate staff member.
- Encourage safe engagement with social media; using social media in a positive way to share health-promoting information. For guidelines around managing social media see [fact sheet Managing social media following a suicide](#).

If you believe that a young person is at risk of suicide seek professional support from the local mental health service or emergency department. Ensure they are in a safe environment (remove medications or weapons) and stay with them (or arrange for supervision) until they can be assessed.

Please refer to the [headspace School Support Suicide Postvention Toolkit – A Guide for Secondary Schools](#) for further guidance.

For more information on suicide or support and assistance visit headspace.org.au/schoolsupport or headspace.org.au

Acknowledgements

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 Together To Live www.togetherforall.ca/postvention, Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health

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Appendix T: Suicide in Children and Young People

See [JSNA - Comprehensive Needs Assessments \(eastsussexjsna.org.uk\)](http://eastsussexjsna.org.uk) for East Sussex data.

Visit <https://www.ncmd.info/publications/child-suicide-report/> for a report that draws on data from the National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) to identify the common characteristics of children and young people who die by suicide, investigate factors associated with these deaths and pull out recommendations for service providers and policymakers.