

Coronavirus Related Critical Incident Support to Schools and Settings Northamptonshire Educational Psychology Service

April 2020

“An incident becomes a critical incident when it constitutes a serious disruption arising with little or no warning on a scale beyond the coping capacity of the school operating under normal conditions, and requiring the assistance of the Emergency Services and/or Northamptonshire County Council and others.” (Developing a School Critical Incident Plan NCC)

The Coronavirus pandemic is impacting significantly upon our settings, families, communities and our way of life. The current situation means that there is an increased risk of critical incidents, tragic and traumatic events, both within a setting and its wider community. This is coupled with a general raised level of anxiety due to the uncertainty around the virus and the particularly challenging circumstance of most children being at home and many staff working remotely.

The Northamptonshire Educational Psychology Service (EPS) continues to offer critical incident support to Headteachers and members of Senior Leadership Teams in all settings across the county. **In the event of a Coronavirus-related critical incident, the EP Service’s primary aim will be to offer short-term support to the Senior Leadership Team in order to facilitate the appropriate management of the event.** The approach taken is based on research into best practice and is founded on supporting settings to manage the immediate aftermath of an event with the focus on promoting a sense of safety, calm, self and community efficacy, connectedness and hope.

Whilst no two incidents are the same, responses to critical incidents follow a recognised pattern. **With time, most children and adults will come to terms with what has happened and recover without the need for professional counselling. Research tells us that help and support is best given by trusted, familiar adults as and when it is needed. The EPS will support settings to facilitate this and be confident in this role.** Despite the huge efforts being made to stay in regular contact with children and young people, school communities may feel less well-connected to each other in our current circumstances and the approaches taken will need to acknowledge the very different context within which we are working.

In the event of a critical incident, it is important that settings let the Local Authority know as soon as possible:

Telephone: 0300 126 1012

or email: emergencyplanning1@northamptonshire.gov.uk

*Please note that, for the purposes of this document, the term ‘settings’ is used to refer to all education providers: schools, colleges and early years settings

Initially a senior member of the Educational Psychology Service will contact you in order to establish what steps have been taken so far and identify what needs to happen next. This contact will be made by telephone or video call. Typically, any further/ongoing support will be provided by the named EP for the setting, but flexibility may be required.

If the incident does not fit within the definition of a critical incident (see above), but you still need **advice from the EPS** about a tragic death or traumatic event, then please do contact us directly using this email contact (currently staffed by our admin team in place of the usual contact telephone number): VLAdmin@childrenfirstnorthamptonshire.co.uk

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

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

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

If after a period of time, there are members of the setting's community who are showing signs of continued distress the EP will discuss this and signpost to further support. We do not advise an immediate offer of counselling to bereaved children/young people: grief is a normal process and there is no one process for everyone who grieves. Children/young people may, however, need reassurance that whatever emotions they are feeling are normal. It is only when feelings remain overwhelming over a period of weeks and interfere with the activities of daily living that counselling support may be a more appropriate offer. Some families with less community support may wish to seek professional support earlier, particularly during the phase of acute social distancing.

Information and training for schools:

Once all children, young people and staff all return to their settings, the EPS [Targeted Mental Health in Schools offer](#) will resume, including training on a variety of topics to support emotional responses to the current public health crisis.

The EPS is providing regular updates and information on issues affecting children, young people, parents and staff in the current public health crisis. These are available on our [website](#).

Documents to support settings to manage critical incidents, tragic and traumatic events can be found on the [School Emergency Plans](#) pages of the NCC website. We would recommend that headteachers and managers look at this now in order to plan and prepare for an incident in the future.

There are plenty of websites with information to support settings when a member of staff, child or young person dies or is affected by the death of a loved one. Some sites offer specific content around Coronavirus. We would particularly recommend:

Child Bereavement UK:

<https://childbereavementuk.org/>

Winston's Wish:

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

Samaritans:

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

With thanks to colleagues in Camden EPS and York EPS whose critical incident advice supplemented our own.

*Please note that, for the purposes of this document, the term 'settings' is used to refer to all education providers: schools, colleges and early years settings