



CRITICAL INCIDENT SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS - COVID-19 INFORMED Additional Information for Lambeth Schools and Settings*

Lambeth Educational Psychology Service (EPS) May 2020

“A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of that school.”

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting on all our schools, families, communities and way of life. The current situation means that there is an increased risk of critical incidents both in the school and the wider school community. This is coupled with a collective raised level of anxiety due to uncertainty around the corona crisis and the additional complication of the nationwide closure of schools. There is also heightened anxiety related to planning for the gradual re-opening of schools / settings and the associated management of risk.

Lambeth’s Educational Psychology Team continues to offer a critical incident response to Headteachers in schools, and to senior leaders where they have a lead for critical incident responses in that school. In the event of a COVID related critical incident, the EP teams primary aim will be to offer short-term psychological support to the school’s management team to appropriately manage the event. The approach taken will focus on supporting the school to promote a sense of safety, calm, self and community efficacy, connectedness and hope.

A new context:

Schools and settings are facing additional challenges when managing critical incidents in the particularly challenging circumstance when most children are at home and many staff are working remotely (and with many staff self-isolating with suspected COVID-19 or because they are at increased risk). Whilst huge efforts are being made to stay in regular contact with children and young people, school and college communities are likely to feel less connected, especially over school holiday periods.

Further guidance to support managing bereavement due to COVID-19:

It is hoped that this policy would sit alongside the direct psychological support we can provide and alongside existing policy guidance. How to support pupils and members of staff before, during and after a bereavement. Our aim is to help pupils and staff in:

- Understanding the grief process and current thinking on models of grief.
- How to support pupils and members of staff with complex grief responses, arising from COVID-19.
- Children’s concepts of death depending on their age and cognitive abilities.
- Preparing pupils and staff for the return of a grieving pupil or staff member. The Educational Psychology Service is aware that schools that have experienced a bereavement through COVID-19 are likely to seek additional support later in the summer term as preparation is made for the return to school, when the community comes together in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- Supporting bereaved children through difficult times i.e. bereaved children prior to COVID-19
- Supporting a grieving child/staff member in the classroom/ school (and currently remotely).
- Practical issues such as memorials / books of condolences.
- We will update our signposting to resources available

* Please note that, for the purposes of this document, the term ‘settings’ is used to refer to all education providers: schools, colleges, Post 16 and early years settings
For information on graduated approach to support, please see next page.

Useful Websites:

Child Bereavement UK
Child Bereavement UK – Elephants Tea Party
Child Bereavement UK – supporting children with COVID-19

Cruse - bereavement Care
Cruse - support for schools
Cruse - support for parents
Cruse - managing bereavement and grief
Cruse - COVID-19 support for children and young people

Hope Again - bereavement support for young people

Grief Encounter

Winston’s Wish
Winston’s Wish - COVID-19

Samaritans

Papyrus - prevention of suicide in young people

Contacting Us:

Please be aware that even though we are working from home, we may not be immediately available or may be on annual leave over the school holiday period, and so we have offered a range of contact points.

For further information, please contact: Sue Franklin (SFranklin@lambeth.gov.uk), Shona MacGregor (SMacGregor@lambeth.gov.uk) or Anne-Marie Buchanan (ABuchanan@lambeth.gov.uk).

Helping children understand:

The following website has helpful information for children about COVID-19: [click here](#).

Carol Gray has opened her resources to free access and her social story for COVID-19 19 is useful. [Click here for more information](#).

Speak to your link EP and encourage parents to [request a free consultation](#) with an Educational Psychologist for further ideas.

A graduated approach to providing support:

Level 1: *In the event of the death of parent of a child or young person on roll and/or family member of staff which may impact some of the school community.*

We aim to support schools to be able to access resources and feel prepared to respond. Headteachers may wish to have a telephone conversation with their school's allocated Educational Psychologist to be able to think together about how best to approach the unique circumstance. In the event that your school's allocated psychologist is unavailable, please contact the team on the telephone numbers below and we will ensure an EP is made available to contact you for a telephone consultation. Schools may also contact a member of Lambeth children's services who will forward the message to an available member of the team.

Level 2: *In the event of the death of a pupil on roll and/or a staff member, impacting on the whole school community.*

We are offering Headteachers and key staff in the school a Microsoft Teams consultation with two educational psychologists – ideally your school's educational psychologist together with one of the team's leads for critical incidents. Please contact the team on the telephone numbers below and we will contact you to offer initial support and arrange a follow up telephone consultation with identified members of the school staff and Educational Psychology Service (EPS).

Schools may also contact a member of Lambeth Educational Service who will forward the message to an available member of the EPS.

Level 3: *Where there is a critical incident that impacts on the wider community, for example death as a result of serious youth violence.*

Events at level 3 are usually responded to and coordinated by agencies such as the police, Early Help, Youth Offending Service. We will continue to offer schools support within a wider response. The Headteacher can contact the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) directly, or alternatively another agency may have alerted the EPS and we will contact the Headteacher to think through what support is needed.

What happens when we work with you following a critical incident?

What happens next depends on the individual needs of the school. However, it will generally include advice on the following (with a focus on promoting connectedness, whilst apart at this time):

- Clarifying the facts – what is known, what are perceived or potential narratives in the community, including social media
- Communication with parents – language, messaging, listening and asking questions
- What is the family's views on what can be shared / what they want to be shared?
- How to communicate the information to children and staff – to whom, and when
- Share information with school staff to talk about typical responses to critical incidents and how to manage them
- Reducing anxiety and de-escalating panic responses – families, children, staff.
- Support for staff and pupils both within school and externally regarding their own wellbeing
- Identification of, and planning for, vulnerable children who may be affected.
- Managing social media and the press – accessing LB Lambeth support and advice.

At all levels, the EP will support the school or college in the immediate aftermath of the incident and follow up with you over the next few days to help support with any issues which arise. For levels 2 and 3 responses, this is typically by a combination of telephone calls and emails and (in current circumstances remote) meetings with Headteachers and key staff.

Direct help and support are best provided by a trusted, familiar adult as and when it is needed. In time, most children and adults will come to terms with what has happened and recover without the need for professional counselling. We do not advise an immediate offer of counselling to bereaved families – grief is a normal process and those who are grieving may need to be reassured that whatever emotions they are feeling, it is perfectly normal, and there is no one process of grieving for all. It is usually only when feelings remain overwhelming over a period of weeks when counselling support may become a more appropriate offer. Some families with less community support may wish to seek professional support earlier, while we remain in 'lock-down'.

Specific information about COVID-19:

Family members of the person who has died may have particularly strong emotions around feelings of guilt as well as feelings of loss. They may have been socially isolated from the person who has died, and not had recent or usual levels of contact. The key focus with families is to listen to their concerns and worries, exploring the impact on the various members of their family. Relatively small-sounding or illogical issues may be overwhelming. Are any family members feeling in any way responsible? Are they dwelling on what they might have done differently, for example to protect the person who has died from infection? Should they be doing anything differently now to protect other members of the family?

Families or staff colleagues may need reassurance that their response is 'normal', and we can manage to hear them speak about painful issues. Those staff in direct contact with bereaved families will need support around them to debrief and process their own feelings. Headteachers will be holding and containing levels of anxiety from across different parts of the school community and will need to think about where they get their own emotional support. This is in part why the Educational Psychology Service responds initially to Headteachers.

With thanks to Bradford EPS, York and Camden EPS whose critical incident advice supplemented our own.