

Coronavirus Related Critical Incidents in Schools – 10 Point Briefing

“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.” Critical incidents vary greatly in magnitude from the expected death of a staff member, to sudden and traumatic incidents.

1. The current situation with Coronavirus means that there is an increased risk of critical incidents both within the school and the wider school community. This is coupled with a general raised level of anxiety due to the uncertainty around the virus and additional complication of potential school closures.
2. In the event of a critical incident, Harrow Educational Psychology Service will offer support to the school's management team in the first instance in order to appropriately manage the event. The approach taken is based on research into best practice and is founded on helping schools manage the immediate aftermath of an event, including advice and support around communication, practical arrangements and managing emotions.
3. Whilst no two incidents are the same, responses to critical incidents follow a recognised pattern and with time, most children and adults will come to terms with what has happened and recover without the need for professional counselling. Help and support is best given by trusted, familiar adults as and when it is needed. Whilst school closures may add additional challenge, as the usual containing elements may not be there for example staff support and school routines, the Educational Psychology Service will support schools to facilitate this.
4. When an incident occurs, it is important that schools let the Educational Psychology Service know as soon as possible. Tel: 0208 051 8380, 07704 541252 educationalpsychology.services@harrow.gov.uk You will then be contacted by a member of Harrow Educational Psychology Service to identify what support is required.
5. A senior member of the Educational Psychology Service will contact you to identify what steps have been taken so far and what needs to happen next. This will be by telephone or video call.
6. What happens next depends on the magnitude of the incident, but may include advice about:
 - How to communicate the information to children and staff: what messaging systems are available? Form of words to express regret but at the same time reduce anxiety and possible panic.

- How to communicate with parents: what messaging systems are available? How to do this in a way that expresses regret without raising anxiety levels and possible panic.
 - Sharing information with staff to talk about typical responses to critical incidents and how to manage them while recognising that this is a new situation for all of us.
 - Providing a focus for students to share feelings for example use of tutor / mentor groups; other school sharing forums (likely done via alternative means such as video call).
 - Identification of and planning for vulnerable children.
 - Practical issues such as memorials / books of condolences.
7. The Educational Psychologist working with you in managing the incident will support you in the immediate aftermath of the incident and they will also follow up with you over the next few days to support with any issues that arise. It is likely that this will be done remotely.
8. If, after a period of time, there are members of the school community who are showing signs of continued distress the Educational Psychologist will discuss this and signpost to further support. It is also important to note that in instances where trauma has had an effect on a community, there is evidence that post-traumatic growth can also occur. It is important for us all to hold on to this in a time of much uncertainty and stress.
9. Documents to support schools to manage critical incidents can be found here (please note, these are being developed in relation to the current emergency situation relating to Coronavirus). The EPS 'Loss, Bereavement and Critical Incident Booklet' also contains information including contact details for local organisations offering support (p40 onwards): <https://www.harrowlocaloffer.co.uk/services/education/educational-psychology-service>
10. Services offering bereavement support / counselling include the following:
- Bereavement Care www.bereavementcareandsupport.co.uk 0208 427 5720
 - Child Bereavement UK www.childbereavementuk.org 0800 028 8840
 - Winston's Wish www.winstonswish.org/coronavirus 0808 802 0021

For further information, please contact:
 Hugh Watson, Principal Educational Psychologist
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 020 8051 8380, 07704 541252

Note: as the situation and sources of information are developing, the above guidance may be updated (dated 26.03.20)

Harrow Educational Psychology Service

For more information about Harrow services for young people with special educational needs and disabilities, please visit: <http://harrowlocaloffer.co.uk/>

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