



Coping with Crises

**a Guide for Education
Settings and Services for
Children & Young People**

This document outlines good practice when responding to a crisis/ critical incident with a focus on partnership working between education settings and Children's Services within the local authority.

DEVELOPED BY THE CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
SERVICE

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1. QUICK GUIDE



Before Critical Incident

- Develop the following policies :
 - Bereavement Policy
 - Emergency Management Plan / Critical Incident Policy
 - Suicide Prevention Policy (*school age upwards*)

(see Section 3: preparation for Critical Incidents and Emergencies Guidance)



During a Critical Incident

- Follow your own Critical Incident Plan and Contact Emergency Services if necessary
- Follow Immediate Action (Day 1) Guidance
- Inform Director for Children's Services (by phone, 01902 553035, and followed up using Part A of the Critical Incidents Notification Form) to receive free LA support with the Critical Incident Response

Guiding Principles:

- Safety
- Calming
- Self and Collective Efficacy
- Connectedness
- Hope

2. INTRODUCTION

All education settings should have emergency plans in place detailing what you would do and how you would respond if you needed to take any temporary actions in the event of an emergency. Advice on developing such an individual school plan is available in the Department for Education document, '*Emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care settings*': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-planning-and-response-for-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings>

This document outlines good practice when responding to a crisis/ critical incident with a focus on partnership working between schools and Children's Services within the local authority.

Please note that the term 'school' is used within this document to refer to all educational settings including schools, colleges, special schools, nurseries and pupil referral units.

We recommend that all educational settings have the following individualised policies in place:

- Bereavement Policy
- Emergency Management Plan / Critical Incident Policy
- Suicide Prevention Policy (*school age upwards*)

This document is advised by the evidence-informed approach suggested by Hobfall et al (2007). The five guiding principles emerging from this study are those of promoting safety, calming, self and collective-efficacy, connectedness and hope. These guidelines are intended to help schools to minimise emotional distress and reduce long-term mental health problems for members of the school community following a crisis affecting a school.

This document uses a three-level model to consider crises in school which affect the emotional wellbeing of members of the school community:

- Level 1 – Bereavement and Loss
- Level 2 – Critical Incidents
- Level 3 – Major Disaster

Schools should follow the Pathway as outlined in Section 3.0 when an incident occurs.

3. CRITICAL INCIDENTS PATHWAY

Level of Incident	Examples of Incident	Notification Process	Local Authority Response	Does this require a traded service
<p>Level 1 Bereavement and Loss</p> <p>There will be incidents that occur within the school community that involve bereavement and loss for one or just a small number of individuals. In these circumstances school may well be able to cope with their own resources or minimal support from outside agencies. This would not be considered a critical incident, but further advice can be sought on supporting young people with bereavement and loss by contacting the SEND and Inclusion Service.</p>	<p>Examples might include:</p> <p>Death or serious injury of a close family relative of a student or staff member.</p>	<p>The Local Authority are not required to be notified.</p>	<p>The Educational Psychology Service can provide support through their traded service.</p> <p>There are also some helpful resources available from charities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Winston's Wish, (https://www.winstonswish.org/supporting-you/support-for-schools/) - this includes a school bereavement policy template; and - Child Bereavement UK (https://www.childbereavementuk.org/Listing/Category/schools-further-education/). <p>Having a School Bereavement Policy in place may be helpful to guide your response. Winston's Wish have developed some guidance and templates: https://www.winstonswish.org/schooldownloads/</p>	<p>Perhaps - where schools require support this will be on a traded basis.</p>

<p>Level 2 Critical Incidents</p> <p>A critical incident for a school can cover a range of events. The key element being that members of the school community (including pupils, teachers, non-teaching staff and any other adults) have experienced the event as being traumatic and that it presents a challenge to a school's usual procedures and coping strategies. Therefore, school will need to call on specialist involvement from outside agencies including the Local Authority as appropriate.</p>	<p>Examples might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudden death of a member of staff or student • Violent attack within or near the school • School fire • Death or serious injuries on a school trip. 	<p>The Director for Children's Services should be notified in the first instance by telephone, 01902 553035 (see Appendix A), and then followed up by completing and emailing Part A of the Critical Incidents Notification Form (see Appendix B)</p> <p>They will then notify the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Head of Education Excellence, - Head of SEND & Inclusion - Head of school Business & Support - Principal Educational Psychologist 	<p>The Local Authority will provide a free coordinated response via the Educational Psychology Service, if necessary, supported by Social Care and/or the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership.</p> <p>This will be based on the nature of the incident and will be outlined in an immediate/ medium and long-term plan.</p> <p>Support that the EP Service may offer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - help school/setting staff deal with the initial shock of crisis situations and planning. - support Senior Leadership Team with the re-establishment of normal routines - help identify vulnerable individuals - staff and pupils - information about other support services and suggest appropriate resources - time-limited support to the organisation or to individuals - information on loss and bereavement that is appropriate to age and stage of development - If the incident was violent, the Violence Reduction Partnership will be invited by the EPS to be part of the Day 1 planning and offer ongoing support. 	<p>Immediate support will be free and not require a traded or commissioned service.</p> <p>Medium or long term support may require a commissioned service.</p>
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<p>Level 3 Major Disaster A large-scale incident with extensive impact on members of the school and the wider community.</p> <p>Specialist involvement will be required and may be co-ordinated by the Local Authority's Emergency Planning Department. Support from Strengthening Families Hubs, including members of the Psychology Service, is likely to be a part of this larger scale response.</p>	<p>Examples might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural disaster, such as a landslide, earthquake or flood which threatens lives and homes in the local community. • Terrorist or other violent attack which affects the local community, probably in significant numbers. 	<p>See City of Wolverhampton's Emergency Plan</p> <p>https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/community/incident-and-emergency-planning/what-do-emergency</p>	<p>The Local Authority will, by invitation, provide a coordinated response. The Deputy Director of Education will ensure there is support for the Head Teacher where the delivery of Education is provided. The Head of SEND and Inclusion and the Principal Educational Psychologist will co-ordinate a front-line operational response.</p> <p>This will be based on the nature of the incident and will be outlined in an immediate/ medium- and long-term plan.</p>	<p>No</p>
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4. PREPARATION FOR CRITICAL INCIDENTS AND EMERGENCIES

Integrated Emergency Management (IEM) approach:

Preparing for emergencies is an ongoing process; in the UK we follow the Integrated Emergency Management (IEM) approach (a holistic approach to preventing and managing emergencies) which includes six key activities:

1. **Anticipation:** Actively horizon-scanning for risks and potential emergencies before they happen, during and throughout the recovery stage.
2. **Assessment:** Most commonly carried out through risk assessments
3. **Prevention:** Implementation of mitigation measures and taking action to prevent an emergency
4. **Preparation:** Developing and embedding plans; training and exercising
5. **Response:** Responding to the direct and indirect effects of an incident
6. **Recovery:** Rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating to a new normality

You should consider all elements of this wider incident management process for you to:

- a) reduce the likelihood of an incident,
- b) ensure you are as prepared as possible to respond should the need arise,
- c) facilitate a robust recovery process to ensure pupils, staff and parents are adequately supported.

Throughout each stage it is important to consult members of the school community including staff, governors/ trustees and parents/carers to gain their involvement and support.

Developing Individualised Emergency Management Plans:

All education settings should have emergency plans in place detailing what you would do and how you would respond if you needed to take any temporary actions in the event of an emergency. Schools are advised to develop an **Individualised Emergency Management Plan** to meet the needs of their own establishment and community. Advice on developing such an individual school plan is available in the Department for Education document, '*Emergency planning and response for education, childcare, and children's social care settings*':

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-planning-and-response-for-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings>

By their nature, critical incidents cause a high level of stress and devising a plan in advance can help to reduce this stress and will enable staff to focus on dealing with the presenting specific issues in hand. It also provides a rationale for the actions that are taken as an incident occurs.

All staff need to have knowledge of the plan, as it is not possible to determine in advance who might be affected or called into action. It is best practice for staff to be involved in drawing up the plan so that there is a collective understanding and commitment to support it.

Nottinghamshire County Council have developed National resources for schools which include guidance and templates for developing and reviewing an emergency plan, information regarding providing training to staff who could become involved in an incident and organising emergency planning exercises: <https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/emergencies-and-disruption/school-emergencies>

The UK Trauma Council have also developed some good quality templates for Critical Incident Policies for Early Years, School Age and Further Education settings:

<https://uktraumacouncil.org/resources/ci-policy?cn-reloaded=1>

It is helpful if your plan contains the following:

1. Roles and responsibilities
2. Activation procedures
3. Key contact details (these will need to be kept up-to-date)
4. Action cards for responding to specific risks as identified in your risk assessment/through liaison with emergency service/emergency planning teams. These should include immediate, medium and long-term actions (see Section 5 for suggested actions).
5. Training and exercising schedule
6. Media management
7. Incident log template
8. Recovery strategies
9. Review processes for the emergency plan

Suicide Prevention Policy:

Whilst it is a very difficult topic to consider, we advise that schools include suicide in their emergency plans. As a city, we have promoted a proactive approach towards the prevention of suicide, which includes encouraging schools to develop a **Suicide Prevention Policy**. This should include information about how the school would respond in the event of a suicide.

Guidance from the charity Papyrus: Prevention of Young Suicide can be found here:

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

5. RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS (IMMEDIATE, MEDIUM AND LONG-TERM)

Immediate Actions (Day 1):

(see Appendix C for more detailed information regarding each suggested action on day 1 and guiding principles to support the emotional needs of the school community)

1. **Obtain accurate information:** Head Teacher/ SLT to obtain accurate information from a reliable source.
2. **Inform the Local Authority:** Inform the Director for Children's Services (by phone, 01902 553035, and follow up emailing Part A of the Critical Incidents Notification Form, Appendix B)
3. **Organise a team within school:** Head Teacher/SLT to inform chair of governors and then nominate a team within the school who will deal with the immediate aftermath of a critical incident.
4. **Identify incident management room:** ensure there is a dedicated phone line/ mobile phone.
5. **LA Support:** The LA Educational Psychology Service will make contact with named staff to support with planning.
6. **Information Sharing:** Disseminate accurate information in a timely fashion to:
 - Families whose children/next of kin are involved.
 - Teaching and non-teaching staff
 - Pupils
 - Parents/carers of children who were not involved.
7. **Dealing with the Media:** Nominate spokesperson to liaise with Council Press Office (if appropriate).
8. **Maintain normal school routines as far as possible:** attempt to maintain a normal routine for those not directly involved so that they feel as safe and calm as possible.
9. **Review and Debrief Meeting:** Conduct a review meeting to evaluate the day's events and plan for the following day (as appropriate).
10. **Part B of the Critical Incident Notification Form:** LA lead will disseminate this to relevant colleagues.

Medium Term Actions (2nd/3rd day):

1. **Head Teacher/SLT to obtain any new information.**
2. **Meeting of School team and Local Authority Coordinator (relevant services):** disseminate new information and consider issues outlined below.
3. **Develop a support plan:** plan for meeting the emotional needs of the school community including:
 - Support for everyone involved in the incident (including SLT and staff who have been leading the response)
 - Identify individuals (pupils and staff) experiencing severe reactions.
4. **Consider dealing with personal effects and school communication systems/ data bases (if relevant):** consider how to deal with personal effects of any pupils or staff who may not be returning to the school. Specific consideration should be given to supporting siblings, relatives and close friends etc following a bereavement. Consider also school communication systems / data bases which may send out automated messages (e.g. lunch/trip reminders).
5. **Give consideration to cultural and religious practices:** e.g. with regard to different time periods for burials to take place.

Longer Term Actions:

1. **Implement medium term actions.**
2. **Return to school routines.**
3. **Continue to monitor:** monitor individual needs and discuss these with relevant agencies for appropriate support. This will be given through the usual support channels within the authority such as traded services, health services and the CAMHS single point of access.
4. **Work as a whole-school community:** The school community will need to consider if and how it wishes to mark anniversaries and establish memorials (consideration should be given to sensitive times/dates such as holiday periods, exam results day, year group assemblies, graduation/prom etc). When doing this, it will be important to consult with those affected and liaise with family members to ensure they are in agreement with arrangements and included if they wish to be. Adequate time needs to be put aside for this consultation to be done properly. Draw on external support when needed.

APPENDIX A: IMPORTANT CONTACT NUMBERS

CONTACT	NUMBER
Director for Children's Services Alison.Hinds@wolverhampton.gov.uk	01902 553035
Deputy Director of Education Brenda.Wile@wolverhampton.gov.uk	01902 552553
Head of Service SEND and Inclusion Helen.Bakewell@wolverhampton.gov.uk	01902 551583
Head of Education Excellence Phil.Leivers@wolverhampton.gov.uk	
Head of School Business and Support Services Bill.Hague@wolverhampton.gov.uk	01902 555100
Principal Educational Psychologist Emma.Thornbery@wolverhampton.gov.uk	01902 550609/555934
Local Authority Press Office communications@wolverhampton.gov.uk	01902 554077
Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub	01902 555392
New Cross Emergency Department	01902 307999
CAMHS Single Point of Access BCHFT.WolvesCAMHSSPA@nhs.net	01902 444 021

APPENDIX B: CRITICAL INCIDENT INFORMATION NOTIFICATION FORMS

This form is to be completed and sent to the Director for Children's Services (Alison.hinds@wolverhampton.gov.uk) where a Level 2 critical incident occurs.

Information about an incident may come from a number of sources (e.g. member of staff, pupil, parent / carer, member of the public, the emergency services, the local authority). Whoever receives the alert should ask for, and record, as much information as possible:

- ✓ Maintain a written record of your actions using this form and a logbook. You may wish to record any new contact details.
- ✓ Offer reassurance and support. Be aware that all those involved in the incident (both directly and indirectly) may be suffering from shock or may panic.
- ✓ Find out what has happened. Obtain as clear a picture as you can.
- ✓ Discuss with the informant what action needs to be taken and by whom.

**Part A: Initial Critical Incident Notification form
(to be completed by the Educational Establishment)**

Name of Education Setting:	
Details of the Incident: (factual information only) What happened (detail, date, time, how were you informed)? People affected? Actions taken so far?	
Critical Incident Team Leader: (include contact phone number and email address)	

Part B: End of Day 1 Review**(to be completed by the LA Coordinator on the day of the response)**

Please list the external agencies who have been involved and actions that have been taken during Day 1 and further actions that have been agreed.

Day 1 Support Team		
Name	Role	Contact Details

Day 1 Actions		
Action	Completed by	Comments/Notes

Next Steps/Further Support Required		
<i>(please note ideas for further support even if you are unsure who may be able to meet this need)</i>		
Action Needed	Who will provide this?	By when?

APPENDIX C: DETAILED INFORMATION TO SUPPORT SUGGESTED ACTIONS ON DAY 1

Immediate – The First Few Hours/Day 1

1. Obtain accurate information

The school will need to obtain accurate information regarding what has happened. There are a number of possible sources for this depending on the nature of the incident. This could include first-hand information from people within the school or community, reports from emergency services or even the British Embassy if an incident occurred abroad. It must be borne in mind that information gained from the media may be inaccurate or biased.

2. Inform Council Officials via telephone and the Notification Form Part A (Appendix B)

Alison Hinds (Director for Children's Services) - 01902 553035

Alison.hinds@wolverhampton.gov.uk

3. Establish The School Team

As soon as the incident has been confirmed it is advisable to contact the chair of governors and establish a team of school staff to manage the school's response over the next few hours. This may include key members of the school's Senior Leadership Team, pastoral and administrative staff although other staff or governors could play a role. A basic team can be included in the emergency management plan however, the exact members of the team may need to be established depending on the particular nature and circumstances of the event.

4. Incident management room and phone

It is likely that the school's main phone line will become extremely busy with enquiries. Therefore, a designated phone line on which the school team can be contacted would be beneficial. This number would need to be communicated to key professionals and agencies so that information can be easily exchanged.

- a) All staff who make and receive calls in a critical incident situation should ensure that they keep notes of who has called and the information given or received so that no-one is omitted when disseminating information.
- b) In the event of an incident occurring on a school visit, the educational visit leader would need to have contact numbers for school senior managers in and out of school hours in order to report the incident.

5. LA Support

The local authority will identify a coordinator who will be responsible for coordinating the local authorities response.

The allocated Educational Psychologist and any other key LA professionals will work in partnership with the school team, and all will need to be briefed with the most accurate and up to date information. Decisions can then be made on how to co-ordinate the rest of the day and identify appropriate professionals to be involved, taking into account the physical, psychological, emotional and environmental wellbeing and needs of all concerned. If the incident was violent, the Educational Psychologist will contact the Violence Reduction Partnership, who will be invited to support with Day 1 planning and ongoing support.

In the event of a critical incident occurring, LA professionals will prioritise it above planned work and respond appropriately according to the nature of the incident. Types of support available in the immediate phase could include:

- Support with short, medium and longer term planning.
- Advice on sharing information with pupils (taking into consideration their particular needs), parents/carers and staff.
- Advice on appropriate activities for teachers to undertake with children.
- Information on bereavement
- Setting up a 'listening drop-in' for adults and/or pupils who feel the need for this immediate support.
- Signposting to useful information and organisations.

NB: Therapy or counselling would not be appropriate to offer during this immediate phase.

6. Information Sharing:

- In the aftermath of a critical incident unsubstantiated rumours can spread very quickly and cause unnecessary anxiety. Giving accurate information updates can help to maintain a sense of perspective and foster a feeling of safety. Staff and parents/carers should be advised to limit and monitor exposure to news media for themselves and their children as this can cause heightened levels of anxiety.
- The nature and speed of parents/carers being contacted by school will very much depend on the nature of the incident. The sharing of information may be done in person or may need to be done by telephone. In some circumstances parents/carers may need to come into school to receive information. Exactly how potentially distressing information is passed on will depend on the circumstances. However, below there are some suggestions on how this can be done sensitively and effectively:
 - Prepare what needs to be said and how it will be said. Staff may need to rehearse this in advance.
 - The member of staff to impart the information needs to be chosen carefully and it may be advisable to have another member of staff present during discussions. Clarity, sensitivity and empathy will all be important.
 - Keep a note of who has been contacted and what information has been given to avoid duplication or omission.
 - Suggest that parents or next of kin seek support from friends, neighbours or relatives if they feel distressed.
 - Have useful phone numbers to hand so that parents can seek further information as necessary (e.g. hospital numbers)
- Schools routinely keep up to date information about the contact details for children's next of kin and this information is vital in the event of a critical incident. The same information for staff is also necessary in case of emergency.
- Parents/carers of children who are not directly involved will also need to be told that a serious incident has occurred and how their own children might be affected. This could take place in the form of a letter or a larger meeting depending on the circumstances.

- Similarly, all staff (teaching, non-teaching and associate) within school will need to be informed of the situation preferably through a specially convened meeting so that the same information is shared with everyone at the same time.
- Pupils should be told what has happened in a clear and simple way taking into account their specific needs where appropriate. Dependent on the age and developmental level of the young people it may be best to do this in a forum where they have the opportunity to ask questions as well as hear information e.g. in class groups. In order to preserve uniformity, it would be advisable for teachers to have a prepared information sheet with the latest information on the critical incident.
- A question box may be appropriate for children who do not feel confident or ready to ask questions orally. Teachers should impart facts only, not speculation or opinion.

7. Dealing with the Media

If you require any support in dealing with the media, or in developing messages for parents and the wider school community, please email communications@wolverhampton.gov.uk as soon as possible. Rather than dealing with the media directly, you may also wish to signpost journalists to the above email address. If you do this, please ensure you also email communications@wolverhampton.gov.uk so that the Communications Team is aware of the incident, knows to expect contact from the media and is able to liaise with the school to develop a suitable response.

8. Maintain normal school routines as far as possible

Attempt to maintain a normal routine for those not directly involved so that they feel as safe and calm as possible.

9. Review/Debrief Meeting

During the first day the school team should meet to review the situation and actions taken. At this point a plan can start to be formulated for the medium-term response.

10. Part B of the Critical Incident Notification Form

The LA lead will complete this and disseminate it to relevant colleagues. This includes a summary of support provided on Day 1 and further actions for consideration in the medium and longer term.

APPENDIX D: MEETING THE EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Guiding Principles:

Best practice in meeting the emotional needs of the school community is to promote the five guiding principles of safety, calming, self and collective efficacy, connectedness and hope (Hobfall, 2007). There is a more detailed guide from the [UK Trauma Council](#) if you wish to read this. Exactly how these principles are achieved depends on the nature of the critical incident and the setting, but the school may offer the following types of support:

1. Safety

- Providing a safe place for people to meet.
- Being reliable, doing what you say you will do, being where you say you will be and the tone of your communication to staff, children, young people and carers will speak volumes about how reliable others are and how predictable the world is.
- Giving opportunities for appropriate discussion of individuals' experiences, reactions and feelings but limiting the amount of talk about the incident if it makes people more anxious or depressed.
- Limiting exposure to news media.

2. Calming

- Involvement with uplifting activities not associated with the trauma.
- Continue with normal daily routine as far as possible.
- Continue to give accurate and up-to-date on the safety and health of those directly involved.
- Encourage individuals to use any anxiety reducing or relaxation techniques they might find helpful e.g. listening to calming music.
- Staff to model positive thinking and self-talk.
- Reassuring those affected that they are responding in a normal way to a difficult situation.
- Foster positive emotions that include joy, humour, interest, contentment and love to develop coping skills.
- Provide opportunities to be with friends and family.
- Encourage physical activity and exercise (this has an anxiety reducing effect)

3. Self and collective efficacy (in control)

- Involve those affected in decisions about the support offered to them and the ways they want to remember others.
- when working with external services, make sure that they work in a way that is empowering and does not undermine you and your community's sense of self-efficacy

4. Connectedness

- Help individuals to connect with loved ones.
- Ensure that there are frequent opportunities for those affected to engage in supportive interactions with each other and with their social support networks.

- Offer a listening ear to anyone affected.
 - Check that all individuals have an appropriate support network.
 - Signpost to external support where necessary.
5. Hope
- Staff to model positive thinking and self-talk.
 - Reassure those affected that they are responding in a normal way to a difficult situation.
 - Emphasise the strength of the community and school in pulling together in a difficult time.
 - It is important to remember that staff need appropriate support for their own well-being and in their role of supporting pupils in the school.