



Hillingdon Educational Psychology Service

Critical Incident Policy

September 2021



1 - Introduction:

As part of Hillingdon Educational Psychology Service's commitment to support to Hillingdon's educational settings and young people, we offer psychological support to settings in the event of a critical incident. This support is available to all schools and is not a traded service.

A critical incident is an event, usually sudden, that has the potential to cause high levels of distress. Fortunately, such events are relatively unusual, but when they occur the Service is keen to respond and support.

Such critical incidents may include:

- The sudden death of a member of the school community
- Traumatic incidents affecting the school

A flexible and sensitive range of responses is required based on sound psychological understanding of the variety of reactions and needs of both children and adults. The Service aim to ensure sensitivity to and awareness of the diversity of the community.

This document outlines the role that the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) may take in supporting those having important responsibilities and those directly experiencing such incidents.

2 - How the Educational Psychology Service will respond in the event of a critical incident.

- When the initial phone call is received by one of the LA Assistant Directors information about the incident, the Head teacher is reassured that the EPS are experienced in this area and will provide relevant support.
- In the initial phone call between the LA Assistant Director (AD) and Head teacher, the nature of the EP support is not defined (the message conveyed is EP support will be provided and the Principal EP or Senior EP will be in touch via phone asap). The nature and level of EP input will be determined by the EPS (Principal EP and Senior EP will follow up immediately with a phone call to school, to gain information, outline potential support and agree on what will be delivered).
- Key message in initial phone call: "I will contact the Principal Educational Psychologist now and I will make sure that a senior member of the team will be in touch with you as soon as possible. You will hear from them shortly and they will explore next steps in providing you and your school with the appropriate level of support"
- The AD contacts the Principal EP (or relevant cover Senior EP as the EP Team Critical Incident co-ordinator).
- The Principal EP and Senior EP then decide who will lead on the critical incident and will contact the head teacher to discuss the incident with them and advise on the level of response. This first contact is an important part of supporting with the incident. The lead-senior will offer appropriate support to the school and co-ordinate this support with the school's link EP and the EPS.

Commented [CL1]:



- Principal EP keeps both ADs informed throughout.

Critical incident work takes priority over other arrangements made by the EPS. It is expected that individual EPs will re-arrange other commitments if they are required to provide support following a critical incident (with appropriate exceptions such as a tribunal, an important Social Care Case Conference etc.). This will be in negotiation with, and with support of the EPS management team. Please see Appendix A for further information regarding the response that the Team will make following the event of a critical incident.

2.1 – Communication between EPS and school:

Please see Appendix A detailing the response to the first telephone call.

The AD will contact the Principal EP, who will then liaise with the EP Critical Incident Team (made up of two Senior EPs and the Principal EP). A member of the EP Critical Incident Team will then liaise with the relevant professionals and settings and possible support will be discussed and planned. Involvement will be time limited.

Contact details for PEP and Senior EPs are as follows:

Melanie Adkins	Principal Educational Psychologist MAdkins@hillington.gov.uk
Subha Samuel	Senior Educational Psychologist SSamuel@hillington.gov.uk
Ingrida Stankeviciene	Senior Educational Psychologist ISTankeviciene@hillington.gov.uk

Any initial communication should be to gather important information as to the nature of the event(s) and respond to any immediate questions that the school may have. No commitments are made to the caller at this stage as you need to discuss this with colleagues. Agree next action and contacts; all you may be able to agree at this stage is to discuss with colleagues

Support for the critical incident would normally be provided by two members of the EP team, with the school 'link EP' being one of the two. This depends on timeframes and capacity, if the link EP is unavailable then other EPs would be expected to provide the support. If appropriate the identified EPs arrange a convenient time to attend the school. This is prioritised to be provided as quickly as possible.

2.2 – How the Service will support the school:

It is important to have a clear sense of what response the EPS can provide to schools. The exact nature of the support needs to be flexible and responsive and is negotiated individually with school leadership in respect to the nature of the incident, and the needs of the situation.

Commented [CL2]: Would there possibly be some form of support for parents?

Commented [CP3]: I think it is good practice for 2 EPs to support a school, or at least for the initial visit. Is this part of our policy?

Community schools can get support through the Employee Assistance Programme. Might be useful to have details of this to hand



This aim of critical incident support is to help the school support adults to manage the response and support the school community. It may consist of:

- **Support for school leadership to plan their school response**, for example staff briefing, planning letters and information for parents, discussing assembly content etc.
- **Consultation** to school staff and other professional colleagues working with children and young people, which may lead to joining colleagues for particular pieces of work with staff groups or pupil groups.
- **Individual consultation** with staff or professional colleagues who work directly with children and young people.
- **Staff development** sessions can be offered, to schools and other organisations, regarding information and strategies for coping prior to or as a result of bereavement or trauma.
- Occasionally the EP may work with individual or groups of children (the aim is to support the adults to manage the school response) and this support will be negotiated with individual schools and agreed following a specific request for involvement at this level. Consent will be required for this type of work.
- EPS will undertake joint work with other teams and services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Teams and school counsellors, where appropriate.

The immediate aim is to help people to come to terms with the initial and sometimes overwhelming feeling of shock, distress, disbelief and grief and to support school responses. A longer-term objective is to reduce the likelihood of Post Traumatic distress.

Forward planning may help a school community cope better if a crisis occurs, and this could help to reduce the distress for pupils and staff. EPS can help schools to develop a school plan to deal with critical incidents.

3 – The setting for support

Psychological support involves providing a safe space for the adults, children and young people involved to talk about their feelings and experiences.

It is important that a setting is provided that can enable the above. This will be:

- A place that is pleasant and comfortable
- A place that is quiet and free from interruption
- A place that offers privacy



4 –Support for Educational Psychologists involved in critical incidents

Critical incident work provokes a variety of emotional responses. We therefore endeavour to ensure that:

- After each piece of work a debriefing session will be available with an experienced colleague to explore any issues that have arisen and reflect on the process.
- There will be sensitivity towards colleagues who feel they are not in a position to partake in critical incident work. EPs need to discuss any issues and/or concerns with team managers.

4- Recording involvement

The EPS retains a central log of Critical Incidents with which we have been involved and the response provided. This includes a central database and any relevant correspondence saved in the central EPS electronic files. This enables the Service to monitor and provide data on the type and amount of Critical Incident response being provided to the local community. Any EP involved will need to ensure that the details and correspondence are saved centrally during and after involvement.

Commented [CP4]: Will this database be kept in sharepoint

Helpful Publications and Links:

Smith, S. (1999). The Forgotten Mourners: Guidelines for Working with Bereaved Children. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. ISBN 1853027588

Ward, B. (1995). Good Grief: Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Under 11s. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. ISBN 1853023248

Ward, B. (1995). Good Grief: Exploring Feelings, Loss and Death with Over 11s and Adults. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. ISBN 185302340X

Child Death Helpline (0800 282 986).

Grief Encounter Project, PO Box 49701, London N20 8XJ (020 8446 7452, www.griefencounter.com)

Child Bereavement UK. [Child Bereavement UK](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

Anna Freud Centre. [Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families](http://www.annafreud.org)



Young Minds. [YoungMinds | Mental Health Charity For Children And Young People | YoungMinds](#)

Papyrus www.papyrus-uk.org

HOPELINEUK 0800 068 4141 (Suicide Prevention Advice)

Appendix A
Responding to the first telephone call

Commented [CL5]: Swap Appendix A and B around as that's the order that it'll appear in the main body?



You are the professional receiving the call that may have been hard to make. Do not divert the caller to somebody else. Take time, stay calm, allow the caller to express facts and feelings.

Draw the caller into telling the story listening for issues concerns.

- How open and sensitive is their response?
- What appreciation do they have of the impact on staff/ pupils/community.
- Is the caller overwhelmed, in control, or somewhere between?

Check

Is it clear what happened yet?

When did this happen?

What happened?

What else can the caller tell you about the event?

Who was directly involved?

Who else may be affected? How many?

Is there a designated coordinator (usually the head teacher)? Get the name, telephone number, email

Distinguish between fact and hearsay as far as possible. What is the caller not able to tell you?

Is the caller requesting a particular response? Outline the scope of support that might be available (when work is agreed the senior/link educational psychologist offer support to the key adults supporting within the school). Do not make any commitments to the caller at this stage as you need to discuss this with colleagues.

Agree next action and contacts, all you may be able to agree at this stage is to discuss with colleagues

When you put the phone down

Make a written summary of the events known to you at this stage.

Discuss with the PEP/ Senior EPs as soon as you can make contact.

Talk to others who need to be informed on all of your involvement.

Involvement following the call will often involve sending the Head Teacher/DSO via email some supportive documents.



Appendix B

The response that the Team makes will follow the steps outlined in the diagram below:

