

Information to support loss and bereavement during Coronavirus outbreak

The coronavirus pandemic is having an impact on all of our schools, families, communities and way of life. This may bring a collective raised level of anxiety and uncertainty around the crisis. There is the additional complication of the nationwide closure of schools and the feeling of isolation this can bring. The current situation means that there is an increased risk of critical incidents both in the school and the wider school community. This document outlines key points for schools to consider where there is a bereavement of a member of the school community i.e. a student, a student's family member, or a member of school staff.

Key Points for Schools to Consider in Preparation:

- An initial response process in the event of a critical incident to be adapted for your situation/context can be found here: [Coronavirus: How Schools Can Support Children & Young People](#)

Information to share with staff:

- Share information with staff about typical responses to bereavement and how to manage this while recognising that this is a new situation for all of us. Please refer to the Nottingham City Critical Incident Grief and Loss pack.
- Information that can be shared with parents about:
 - [How to tell a child that someone has died](#)
 - [How to help children and young people understand about death appropriate to their age](#)
 - [What helps grieving children and young people](#)

Communicating key messages:

- Who will contact the family to offer condolence on behalf of the school, signpost to resources or support and remain as a point of contact as needed?
- How will you communicate information to staff? What messaging systems are available? Who will lead on this?
- How will you communicate information regarding bereavement if necessary to students? Will you contact the parents only? Plan a [script](#) that expresses regret and reduces anxiety. Further examples of scripts can be found in the Nottingham City Critical Incident pack.
- How do you normally communicate with parents? Will this still be appropriate?

Liaison with the family affected:

- What are the family's wishes about how this news should be shared and who with?
- How would the family like to be contacted by the school (e.g. phone call, text message)?
- How would the family like to receive messages of condolence from the school community (e.g. directly; school to pass these onto the family)? When might they like this to happen?

Identify vulnerable students and staff

- How will you identify those who may be more vulnerable following a bereavement? Who will do this? Consider a keyworker approach to follow up regularly with those children/families during school closure.
- As some staff may be more vulnerable in this situation, ensure that you have support systems in place, e.g. how staff can support each other, use of typical support networks such as [PAM Assist](#) or equivalent used by school and [Cruse counselling](#).

When a student has died

- Share the information with their peers and school community - [Winston's Wish: How to Tell a Child Someone Has Died From Coronavirus](#)
- [Provide resources and information about Coronavirus:](#)
 - ['How to explain coronavirus' for children at home](#)
 - [Coronavirus: What is being done to tackle the virus?](#)
 - [Cartoon about coronavirus](#)
 - [Coronavirus Social Story by Carol Gray](#)
- Consider how to commemorate the student and for their peers to share condolences. This can be done in a number of ways which can be sent to the family or collated and created into a display:
 - Writing poems
 - Collecting drawings
 - Compiling messages electronically
 - Collecting photos
- Share information and resources about grief with the family e.g. books and websites detailed below.
- When school reopens, further commemorations can be considered such as lighting a candle, memorial assembly, tree planting, or creating a special garden area.

Helpful books & resources for bereavement support

- *Something Bad Happened: A Kid's Guide to Coping with Events in the News* by Dawn Huebner (suitable for ages 6-12)
- *The Day the Sea Went out and Never Came Back* by Margot Sunderland (suitable for ages 4-12)
- *Badger's Parting Gifts* by Susan Varley
- *When Dinosaurs Die* by Laurie Krasny-Brown and Marc Brown
- *Always and Forever* by Debi Gliori and Alan Durant
- *When Someone Very Special Dies* by Marge Heegaard (Drawing book suitable for ages 9-12)
- *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst and Joanne Lew-Vriethoff (suitable for ages 4-7)
- *Have You Filled A Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids* by Carol McCloud
- *Sad Isn't Bad: A Good-grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss (Self-help books for kids)* by Michaelene Mundy
- *Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine: Your Activity Book to Help When Someone Has Died* by Diana Crossley
- *No Matter What* by Debi Gliori
- When Someone Special Dies (Child Bereavement UK free resources):
 - [When Someone Special Dies \(Under 7s\)](#)
 - [When Someone Special Dies \(Ages 7-11\)](#)
 - [When Someone Special Dies \(Young People\)](#)
 - [My Dad and Me](#)
- Where students who have peers with pre-existing health conditions, it may be helpful to read and talk through *Goodbye Daisy* by Stephanie Nimmo.

If books are required to reach a large number, teachers can record themselves reading the story and sharing it with the students via email or YouTube. It can be helpful for teachers to create questions or discussion points so students can begin talking with a trusted adult.

Grief and bereavement support

- [Cruse Bereavement Care](#) – dealing with bereavement and grief, including specific information for children and young people.
- [Winston's wish](#) – supporting children through bereavement during coronavirus.
- [Child Bereavement UK](#) – video offering support for parents of children who are or have been bereaved.
- [Hope Again](#) – support website specifically for young people who have been bereaved.

Support for students who have experienced a bereavement of a family member

- Consider how key staff who work closely with the student can reach out to offer their condolences/support (e.g. staff may wish to write them a card/letter).
- Try to find out what the student's wishes are regarding their peers being informed (e.g. would they like school to do this on their behalf).
- If a classmate is bereaved, students may wish to send letters or make a card. School can liaise with the family about how they might like to receive these condolences.
- Identify key members of staff who may be best placed to offer ongoing support for the student.
- Consider how support may be offered remotely (e.g. via video call).
- Activities which staff may wish to explore with a bereaved student:
 - Write a letter or poem to or about their loved one to express the things they have not been able to say in person.
 - Supporting the making of a memory box
 - Encourage journaling, making a scrap-book or photo album
 - Other ideas are available [here](#)

When a staff member has died

- Identify how the news should be shared within the school community.
- Be mindful of extra support needed for students who are particularly close with the staff member.
- Consider how the school community may wish to offer condolences to their family.
- Consider ways to support wider staff resilience during school closures, for example:
 - Supporting one another through phone contact
 - Promoting help-seeking from senior leaders
 - Using online technology to create a 'virtual staffroom' where staff can chat and check-in
 - Creating 'buddy networks' so staff have a small network of individuals they can contact when needed
- Be mindful that staff may find it difficult to achieve 'closure' on the loss of a colleague in the current situation.
- Consider how the loss may be commemorated when school reopens.
- Signpost staff as needed to support agencies, e.g. [PAM Assist Telephone Counselling](#)

Specific Factors to Consider with Coronavirus-related Death:

- **Funerals:** Current restrictions will affect practices around funerals, which may create extra stress and challenges for families and others who are grieving. Supportive guidance is available [here](#)
- **Fear and anxiety about Coronavirus:** Students will have questions about the effects of the virus. For those who have had someone important die or have a member of their family who is ill, their anxiety is likely to be heightened. Fears may include someone else dying, someone becoming ill and unable to look after them, or fears of themselves becoming ill and/or dying. It is important to give students clear facts that are age appropriate whilst offering reassurance. Guidance for parents/carers to share these difficult messages and other helpful resources are available here in the Nottingham City document '[Information to Support Children and Young People during the Coronavirus Outbreak](#)':
 - [Winston's Wish: How to Tell a Child that Someone Has Died from Coronavirus](#)
 - [Winston's Wish: Coronavirus - Supporting Bereaved Children and Young People](#)
- **Isolation:** School closures and current government guidance mean many people are isolated at home away from their usual support networks. Consider how the school may be able to support a feeling of connectedness for bereaved families such as: [Mutual Aid UK](#), [Love your Neighbour](#)
- **Mental Health difficulties:** This is a particularly challenging time for those who are vulnerable and have existing mental health difficulties. For children and young people who are struggling with emotional or mental health difficulties at this time, [Young Minds](#) offer guidance and support. If you are concerned for the mental health and well-being of a child or young person and wish to make a referral, the link to Behaviour and Emotional Health Service (including Targeted Citywide CAMHS) is found on the [Ask Lion](#) website. [The Tomorrow Project](#) are a confidential Notts-based suicide prevention service. Samaritans guidance is also available for schools on [How to prepare for and respond to a suspected suicide in schools](#).

How the EPS can support school settings:

Help and support for children and young people who experience bereavement is 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 without the need for professional counselling. It is not usually necessary for immediate counselling to bereaved families – grief is a normal process and whilst there is no one process of grieving for all, those experiencing loss should be reassured that the emotions they are feeling are valid.

If feelings remain overwhelming and there is an absence of normality after a period of time, it may be appropriate for counselling or similar support to be recommended. During this time of isolation, it may be helpful to identify help earlier for those that are less supported in the community.

In the event of a critical incident, Nottingham City Educational Psychology Service will offer support to the school's staff and management team. The approach taken is founded on helping schools to build capacity to manage the immediate aftermath of an event. This includes advice and support around communication, practical arrangements, and managing emotions. We offer the following:

