

**YSGOL BRO CYNLLAITH**

**Critical Incidents Policy**

September 2021

**The Aim**

Powys County Council (PCC) intends to enable schools to manage their own difficulties, drawing on their own resources and accessing additional support, advice or information from other agencies where appropriate.

*Critical Incident* - “any sudden, unexpected incident involving grief, loss and shock, including situations involving the terminal illness or sudden death of an individual or group of individuals within a school.”

Powys County Council recommends that every Powys school has a school **Critical Incident Management Plan** that has room for flexible and creative responses should an event occur. The plan will have several aims:

* to ensure that swift and appropriate action is taken the moment the school is made aware that a critical incident has occurred
* to provide accurate information effectively to staff, pupils, parents, governors and the LA
* to offer sensitive, non-intrusive support in the short and medium term to all those directly or indirectly affected by what has happened
* to maintain, as far as possible, the normal routines of school life, so as to offer a secure framework of continuities to all pupils

**Preparation before an Incident**

1. Complete the useful contacts list.
2. A list of all pupils’ next of kin and contact phone numbers should be held centrally**,** both on computer and in readily accessible folders, and readily updated.
3. A list of pupils out on visits on any day should also be held in the school office.
4. Staff leading groups of children on any visit should carry contact telephone numbers of two senior staff, and, if possible, should take a mobile phone.
5. A climate of support, trust and confidentiality will strengthen the school’s response at a time of crisis.
6. Recognise the relevance of multi-cultural and multi-faith factors in the response.
7. Consider, in the School Professional Development Plan, the needs of staff for training in areas such as bereavement and childhood resilience.
8. Recognise and utilise ways in which the National Curriculum programmes of study serve to help staff to provide learning experience for pupils about loss, change and bereavement.

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| **USEFUL CONTACTS** | **NAME** | **PHONE No.** |
| **SCHOOL CONTACTS** |  |  |
| Chair of Governing Body | Alison Beeston | 01691 791365 |
| Pastoral lead in school | Rhian JonesHeadteacher | 01691 791365 |
| Trained ELSA | Rachel Lee | 01691 791365 |
| **EXTERNAL CONTACTS** |  |  |
| Head of Schools Service | Lynette Lovell | 01597826422 |
| School Challenge Advisor | Delyth Jones | 07831 490887 |
| Area Educational Psychologist | Alun Flynn | 01686 614044 |
| Principal Educational Psychologist | Clare Jones | 01686 614044 |
| School Nurse | Ruth Overthrow | 01938 556429 |
| Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services | CAMHSCarolyn Jones | 01686 61745007971 752997 |
| Primary Mental Health Practitioner | Hayley Smith | 01597 826705 |
| Educational Welfare Officer | Clair Miles | 01686 614057 |
| Police (Family Protection Team) | Gayle Jones | 101 Ext.5915101267 222020 |
| Counselling Services (including Powys County Council Counselling Service for Powys Employees) | * assist@powys.gov.uk
 | 0345 602 7050 |
| Date of update | October 2021 |  |

**Immediate Tasks**

1. Obtain as much accurate, factual information about the incident as possible.
2. Inform all school staff about the incident.
3. Inform PCC and the Chair of Governors.

The person taking the initial referral will need to know:

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| Your name and position;  |
| Which school you are from;  |
| The nature of the incident;  |
| Where it happened;  |
| The people involved; |
| A call back telephone number. |

1. Contact the County’s Communications Manager, who will be able to act on the school’s behalf (if requested to do so).
2. Prepare a brief written statement that can be used by the school’s secretarial staff to respond to phone calls from parents etc. Such a statement should be updated, as appropriate when new information becomes available.
3. All school-based records or information about the child or children involved in the incident, and who died, are collated and removed to a secure place for a time in case of intrusive investigation.

**Providing information to Pupils**

It is important to ensure that accurate information is disseminated. Pupils within school should be informed of what has happened, using clear terminology (ie use “has died” rather than “passed away” or “gone to sleep”).

Inform close friends and close friends of the siblings individually, or in small numbers.

Inform other pupils, with factual information, calmly and sensitively. Class teachers in the first instance, or form tutors, rather than in large assemblies should do this.

**Informing Parents**

Prepare a letter informing parents and carers of the facts of the incident. Depending on the circumstances, it may also be necessary to provide additional health information or contact numbers where such information can be obtained.

**Examples of Draft Letter**

Letter should include:

* an acknowledgement of what has happened, such as ‘Sadly I have to inform you that one of our pupils (insert name) died recently’;
* Brief facts about the death - provided that the deceased’s parents/family have agreed to this. Include information only about what is known - not speculation;
* a statement that pupils should continue to attend school as usual
* (Depending on the wishes of the family of the deceased) details of the arrangements for the funeral. Primary school pupils wishing to attend the funeral should be collected from school by their parents and permitted to go straight home following the funeral if upset. Pupils attending High School should provide evidence of parental consent for their attendance. Tutor groups may be allowed to attend, with a member of staff;
* a closing expression such as ‘We are deeply saddened by this event and, on your behalf, I extend our condolences to all of (name of pupil)’s family.

The letter should be signed by (or on behalf of) the Headteacher.

**Managing Pupils and Staff**

Pupils who are involved in, or witnessed, the incident should be identified quickly as they may require high levels of support. The severity of children’s (and adults’) reactions will depend on their specific risk factors. These include exposure to the actual event, personal injury or loss of a loved one, level of parental support, dislocation from their home or community, the level of physical destruction, and pre-existing risks, such as a previous traumatic experience or mental illness.

Children who are emotionally vulnerable may be particularly susceptible to adverse reactions to such events, even if they were not directly involved. Such children should be identified, and their reactions monitored. However, most children are resilient with all sorts of difficulties and can be helped to cope by family and friends.

Be alert to changing and varied expressions of grief in children. Feelings of grief, and their expression, are common, appropriate and healthy. Responses vary from person to person, with reactions strongest at the moment of the event and gradually fading as time goes on. This happens more quickly when people are supported by their family, friends and professionally. The following reactions may occur:

* Emotional reactions can be fear, panic, depression, helplessness, anger, wrath, guilt, shame
* Somatic reactions can involve hyper arousal, sleeping problems, digestion problems, headaches
* Cognitive reactions can include confusion, disorientation, uncoordinated thinking, concentration problems, reduced ability to solve problems
* Social reactions include aggression, alcohol/drugs (teenagers), social withdrawal, unable to cope with daily routines

For teachers, it is important to inform students about these facts and encourage them to allow their peers to work through their emotions in their own way and at their own pace. In classes there will be a variety of reactions by students and it often is one of the main problems to get along well with each other after a critical incident.

Children and adults should know that different reactions are common and that they are of different intensity and length. Most people will recover after a few days from the first shock and return to normal, others need more time and a few will not be able to return to normality even after 4-6 weeks. In this case, it is important to seek professional assistance.

At traumatic times it is important to provide as much continuity and security to children as possible. Every attempt should be made to maintain the normal school day, so as to ensure that children are unsettled as little as possible. It will however, be appropriate to undertake tasks that have a low cognitive load, such as art and craft activities, as most children will not be able to concentrate well in the first hours after a traumatic event.

As with any emotionally charged experience, it is important for staff to remain aware of confidentiality issues and respond appropriately to information or concerns shared with them by their pupils.

Identify, and make available, designated places for children to go for *time out,* or for expressions of emotion. This will reduce the likelihood of whole classes becoming increasingly upset through the expressed grief of a small number of its members. It is important to ensure that children who have had an increased exposure to the event (ie they saw, heard or experienced the event happening) and wish to talk about their response, can do so separately from children who were not exposed to the event. This is to avoid traumatising children who were not present for the incident, whilst enabling those who were to express their response in a safe place.

Some children may not be attending school after the incident, and it will be necessary to assist their return to school in ways that meet their individual needs as far as possible. The school could consider such arrangements as:

* negotiating a date for return with parents;
* arranging with parents for a visit by the form teacher or class teacher to a child’s home;
* briefing children who may be able to help in the process of re-settling, and arranging for part-time attendance at first, if this is considered helpful;
* arranging that the child knows about the sanctuary that they can go to if upset during the school day;
* making sure that all staff who teach the child are aware of the need for sensitivity in relation to missed work, and a possible need to re-schedule work;
* checking whether special arrangements with examination boards will be needed;
* Keep staff regularly updated and supported; providing comfort for distressed pupils is a difficult and draining task; all staff, including the headteacher, and members of the senior management team, need the opportunity to express their own feelings. Having the time and space for this to happen is essential;
* Arrangements may be made to express sympathy to the families directly affected by the incident. Injured children can be visited in hospital, and other children who know them encouraged to send letters or cards;
* professionals from the Authority, especially educational psychologists, can work within the school to support the work of teachers with pupils and to be available to staff who wish to consult them;
* other sources of help may be called upon at the discretion of the headteacher, e.g.:
* local religious groups should be contacted and their representatives be invited to meet the headteacher to discuss ways in which they might help in the school’s attempts to support all involved;
* the school could also consider contacting agencies such as CRUSE, and the Samaritans, with a view to making their support available to the bereaved, or to others who may wish to talk to them.

**During the Days Following the Incident**

It is important to try to re-establish normality within the running of the school, however, it is likely that continued opportunities for pupils to take time out, and the availability of extra support will be needed.

Encourage children to be open with their feelings and memories of the person who has died, developing a memorial table with collections of mementoes or photographs, may be helpful. Some children may not know if they are allowed to talk about the person who has died - they should be encouraged that this is appropriate.

Decisions about permanent memorials are best postponed until a few months after the incident, and in consultation with families affected. It is generally not advisable to install visible permanent memorials such as photographs and plaques within the school site although each decision is individual to the community and the event.

Ascertain details of the funeral arrangements. It should be left to the parents of primary age children to decide and take their children the funeral. Secondary aged pupils should decide for themselves whether to attend and it can be helpful to go along in groups of peers.

Staff should continue to monitor children *informally* during the months following the incident. All staff should seek to be available to children who wish to talk to them about what has happened.

An after school meeting, arranged with relevant support staff if required, for parents to discuss practical concerns or bereavement issues may be helpful.

It may be necessary to arrange for children to say goodbyes within the school and the community. Discussions may need to be held with parents, governors and staff about the desirability and the form of events, such as special assemblies and memorial services.

It is possible that affected individuals will experience renewed grief on the anniversary of the incident in the years following its occurrence. The headteacher will need to ensure that staff are made aware that this is a time of remembrance for some, and that sensitivity and support may be needed.

Staff should be aware of any legal proceedings and their implications.

Adopted by The Governing Body of Ysgol Bro Cynllaith on 25th November, 2021

Signed by the Chair of the Governing Body

## THE ROLE OF POWYS EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS INVOLVED IN CRISIS INTERVENTION

## Aims

To enable educational establishments to deal with the initial shock of crisis situations.

To support the senior management of the school/institution with the re-establishment of normal routines.

To mobilise individual and collective resources for dealing with trauma.

To use psychological support to reduce the incidence of post traumatic stress.

To identify vulnerable individuals who need more intensive support.

**Objectives**

Normalisation- helping those involved to realise that their physical, mental and emotional reactions are common and that it is the incident which is abnormal.

Reduction of tension through the airing of feelings and sharing of information.

Cognitive organisation - making sense of the experience and incorporating it into the frame of reference and meaning with which they understand themselves in the world.

Validation and enhancement of existing ways of coping, using the BASICPh model.

Mobilisation of inner resources to develop new ways of coping.

The overriding objective being to prevent post traumatic stress syndrome which can have such a debilitating effect on individual lives.

**When will we be involved?**
In the event of a crisis or emergency situation being reported to the educational psychology service, the service will contact the school(s) whose pupils have been affected, or who are likely to be affected by the event to arrange for appropriate support to be made available to the school.

**What sort of things will the support include?**

* An audit of the needs of the children and staff, including establishing vulnerable staff and children who are likely to require higher levels of support (circles of vulnerability)
* An audit of the skills and resources available in the school to support students and staff
* Advice/information for parents and staff on how to handle children who have experienced a traumatic event.
* Advice/information for teachers on strategies which are helpful to colleagues who have been traumatised.
* Advice on the management of grief and loss in school, including coping with strong emotions such as anger, and providing sympathetic and effective pastoral care.
* Support for senior staff who are dealing directly with the media or distressed parents or governors.
* Group coaching and coping for the most affected children and staff.
* Links with other agencies who will carry out longer term care.
* In a large scale incident the service may need to draw on colleagues in other areas of the county, and to work closely with other agencies.

Schools can contact the psychological service for advice during working hours.

Once the psychological service has been informed of an incident, a decision will be taken as quickly as possible about the level of support that can be offered to the school and who is likely to be coming along to the school to see them.

Telephone contact will be established the same day, and whenever possible, the psychologist who will co-ordinate the service response will visit the school to plan what happens next.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION / RESOURCES**

**Organisations**

*CRUSE CYMRU* offers personal and confidential help to bereaved people.

National Office: 01982 - 560468

Cruise Cymru Bereavement Helpline: 0345 - 585565

Cruse Cymru can also offer support for bereaved children through specially trained volunteer counsellors - contact can be made by the local branch phoning: 01686- 610220; or 01654 - 767117.

*RELEASE* - Bereavement support for children and young people, aimed to give help and support for young people if somebody close dies.

Telephone: 01978 - 316800 Ext. 213

*THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS* is a nation-wide organisation of bereaved parents. They can offer comfort and support, and have an extensive library of titles on all aspects of bereavement. There are also groups which support siblings of a dead child, and for parents who have been bereaved through suicide or murder.

National Office: 0117 - 9665202

Helpline: 0117 - 9539639

**BOOKS**

Yule W & Gold A - 1993:

*Wise before the Event - Coping with Crises in Schools*

LONDON: Calousk Gulbenkian Foundation

ISBN 09033 - 19667

Steffes D - 1997:

*When Someone Dies - How Schools can help Bereaved Students*

RICHMOND: Cruse - Bereavement Care

ISBN 0900321105

James P W - 1997

*Healing the Wounded Heart - Limiting the Damage of Childhood Bereavement*

ISBN 0340678887

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*A Pocket full of posies* Kent County Council

*Critical Incidents: Support Framework for Norfolk Schools Third Edition 1999*

*Forewarned is Forearmed - School Based Responses to Critical Incidents*

Flintshire County Council