

**HOW SCHOOL STAFF CAN SUPPORT PUPILS AT A TIME OF CRISIS**

**INFORMATION FOR STAFF**

Pupils will react to a critical incident in a variety of ways; no two reactions are the same. Their own personality, their family support and their life experiences will influence their responses. Here are some common reactions.

<b>THINKING</b>	<b>FEELINGS</b>
Disbelief Confused Inability to take in information Talking: repeating what they have experienced/heard Nightmares Thinking that they cannot cope Lack of concentration Spending a lot of time thinking of what has happened	Anger Fear Sadness Frightened Irritable Overwhelmed Guilty Worried Easily upset
<b>BEHAVIOURS</b>	<b>PHYSICAL COMPLAINTS</b>
Panic Anxiety Crying Regression Withdrawal Aggression/argumentative	Cold and shivery Unable to rest or settle Hyper-vigilant Feeling sick/knot in stomach Loss of appetite Feel tired all the time

Adults often wish to shield children from pain and distress. Experience and research have shown, however, that children and young pupil are best supported by having the incident acknowledged in an appropriate way rather than ignored. It is important to be available and receptive to pupils, to listen to them, to empathise with them and assure them that their emotions are normal.

It is normal for adults to be upset. It is appropriate for children and young people to see this as it can help them to understand their own emotions. Staff working directly with pupils can show that they are upset, but not out of control. It is important to maintain a safe, secure and predictable environment for the pupils in their care. Staff should remember that they are modelling a response for children and young people and helping them to develop coping skills.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR STAFF

***Never underestimate the positive effect that concern and support from a caring, familiar adult can have on a pupil.***

At a time of crisis pupils can be distressed, frightened and upset. It is desirable for them, in the first instance, to be supported in a familiar environment by adults who are known to them. School has a significant influence on a pupil's life.

1. On a day to day basis it provides support and a social network for the pupil.
2. At a time of a crisis, when pupils may be experiencing insecurity and change, it offers security and containment.
3. Attending school helps to keep a routine and maintain a regular daily pattern.
4. The way staff respond to a pupil can significantly affect the outcome of their experience. So staff reactions are very important.
5. Teachers know the pupils already and they are therefore in a good position to observe change, notice issues which are not being resolved and decide whether onward referral is warranted.

### Useful tips for staff

1. Acknowledge the event to pupils.
2. Talk with pupils, giving them honest factual information, not shocking details.
3. Be willing to listen to them, and give them time.
4. Remain calm, keep control of the situation and contain their feelings (ie allow expression of feelings but not allowing hysteria to build up)
5. Be willing to answer questions. (It is not important that staff answer all questions but that they listen to pupils' fears and worries and take their queries seriously.)
6. Be genuine and professional.
7. Be non-judgemental.
8. Give information to them including the 'normalisation' of their reactions (ie their reactions are normal reactions to an abnormal event).
9. Encourage pupils to talk, share their feelings and seek help as appropriate.
10. Maintain a routine in school (flexible, caring and containing).
11. Offer sensitivity, care and empathy.
12. Keep pupils in relevant peer groups.
13. Keep pupils informed and updated.
14. Allow pupils to make a response to the situation, eg the making of sympathy cards (for family of deceased) or get well cards (if pupils are injured).
15. Involve them in special ceremonies/rituals/any response the school will make.
16. Do not remove a deceased pupil's belongings/work/name from classroom/s and environment – these should be discussed with pupils at a later stage.

### Restoring normal routine

The resumption of normal routines (in as flexible but as structured a way as possible) re-establishes a pattern and support for the pupil while being sensitive enough to respond to the incident and its aftermath.

It is important to be mindful that life has changed for the pupil as well as for the staff. The healing process involves accepting what has happened, coping with the implications of this and adapting over time to the new situation.

It is necessary to continue to monitor pupils' reactions. Most symptoms should settle over time. These may include sleep difficulties, poor concentration, and loss of motivation in schoolwork, avoiding issues/places, upset, worry and anxiety. If they do not show signs of recovery or if they are becoming worse, a pupil may need more specialist support.

Advice and support is available from the appropriate education and library board support services. It is important to recognise that parents may need to be informed that a referral to a General Practitioner is necessary. Some pupils may require a more specialist intervention straight away. Early contact with their parents should be sought in order to discuss this further. Other pupils may need specialist intervention some time after the event. If symptoms persist for longer than 5/6 weeks referral for specialist help should be considered.

***Remember that PARENTS, FRIENDS, PEERS and STAFF are the key supporting people for pupils. Make use of all of them.***