

Critical Incident Response Support: guidance for children, parents and families following a bereavement/critical incident.

Jersey Psychology and Wellbeing Service

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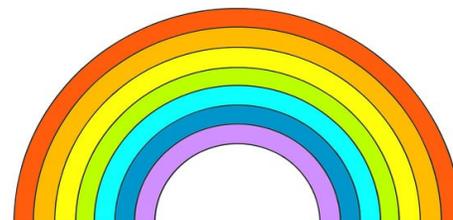
Introduction

A critical incident can be defined as a sudden, unexpected event that is distressing to pupils and/or staff. It may involve violence against members of a school, a serious accident, the sudden death of a child or teacher, or a health pandemic such as COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

It is important to remember that reactions will vary depending upon how directly a child or parent/carer has been involved in the critical incident and upon their past experiences.

Following an incident, a range of feelings may be experienced. Some feelings may be very powerful. Children often do not have the same understanding as adults. They may have more difficulty talking about, and controlling their responses to the feelings aroused by the incident.

This leaflet has been written to offer some general guidance to parents and carers following a critical incident. It may be distributed by a school as a measure of support but is also available to download on gov.je.



In this document:

- What is a critical incident?
- Talking to children about a critical incident.
- How you can help children.
- When to seek help.
- Self-care checklist.
- Taking care of well-being: children and young people.
- Resources and activities to share with children.
- Reading resources.
- Videos.
- Bereavement charities— Jersey.
- Bereavement charities—UK.

The following responses are common after a critical incident:

Shock – a child may be very quiet or they may cry uncontrollably.

Denial – they may find it difficult to believe that something so awful has happened. If someone has died, even though they know the person has died, they may think that the person will return.

Searching – they may worry about losing other people or worry whether the incident will happen again.

Despair – the child may become tearful and reject the affection of others.

Anger – towards the people around them or people involved in the incident, including those who may have been injured, become ill or died.

Anxiety – about things they may or may not have done, or said, to have caused the incident.

Guilt – they may feel that in some way they might have stopped it from happening.

Confusion – about what has happened to those involved in the incident, particularly if someone has died.

Children may show their feelings through behaviour rather than words. These behaviours might include:

- behaving like a younger child
- being more irritable, naughty or aggressive
- becoming very withdrawn
- sleep disturbance, including bad dreams and flashbacks to the incident, fear of being alone or fear of the dark; wanting to be with their parents, or a trusted adults, at all times
- difficulty concentrating, especially at school
- changes in appetite or eating habits
- fears for their own safety, or for the safety of family or friends
- reluctance to talk
- being easily upset
- unwilling to attend school.

All of these can be normal reactions to a distressing event.

Talking to Children about a Health Pandemic: Covid-19 (Coronavirus)

In the current context of Covid-19 parents/carers are faced with the challenge of explaining to their children a whole new situation which brings with it a whole new vocabulary: lockdown, the need to stay home and school being closed, social distancing when out and about and the need for frequent hand washing. These conversations are extremely important as they give parents /carers an opportunity to help their children feel more secure and understand the world in which they live.

Situations such as the current health pandemic are not easy for anyone to comprehend or accept. Understandably, many young children feel confused, upset, and anxious. Parents, teachers, and caring adults can help by listening and responding in an honest, consistent, and supportive manner. Most children, even those exposed to trauma, are quite resilient. Like most adults, they can and do get through difficult times and go on with their lives. By creating an open environment where they feel free to ask questions, parents can help them cope and reduce the possibility of emotional difficulties.

The following information may be helpful to parents and carers when talking with children and young people:

Listen

- Create a time and place for children to ask their questions. Don't force children to talk about things until they're ready.
- Remember that children tend to personalize situations. For example, they may worry about friends or relatives who live in the UK or other countries.
- Support children to find ways to express themselves. Some children may not be able to talk about their thoughts, feelings, or fears. They may be more comfortable drawing pictures, playing with toys, or writing stories or poems directly or indirectly related to current events.

Provide Support

- Help children establish a predictable routine and schedule. Children are reassured by structure and familiarity. Family rituals, routines and activities take on added importance during stressful times.
- Children who have experienced trauma or losses may show more intense reactions to tragedies or news of critical incidents such as COVID-19 and keep safe stay home lockdown policies in place. These children may need extra support and attention.
- Watch for physical symptoms related to stress. Many children show anxiety and stress through complaints of physical aches and pains.
- Watch for possible preoccupation with violent movies or war theme video/computer games.
- Children who seem preoccupied or more stressed about health concerns, for themselves or family and friends, should be evaluated by a qualified mental health professional. Other signs that a child may need professional help include: on-going trouble sleeping, persistent upsetting thoughts, fearful images, intense fears about death, and trouble leaving their parents or going to school. The Primary Mental Health Team can assist with relevant assessments (talk to your school) or see your GP.
- Help children communicate with others and express themselves at home. Some children may want to write letters to the Minister, local newspaper, or to family members.
- Let children be children. They may not want to think or talk a lot about these events. It is OK if they'd rather play ball, climb trees, or ride their bike, etc.



How to help children

Try to answer questions as honestly and accurately as you can.

Continue to do the things that you normally do. Familiar routines and events will provide security.

Be ready to listen if your child wants to talk about his or her feelings.

Treat your child in your usual way, provide continued assurance of love and support.

Allow children to go through their own individual stages of grief.

Don't become upset if your child does not want to talk about his or her feelings.

When to seek help

Children's reactions to a critical incident vary. Some may have reactions that are short-lived. Others may have more severe and long-lasting reactions. As a general rule, counselling would be recommended if the child was continuing to show symptoms 6 months after the critical incident.

If you are concerned about your child, talk to your child's class-teacher or the Head teacher, who may suggest involving an Educational Psychologist or a member of the Primary Mental Health Team.

Alternatively you may wish to call the Educational Psychology Consultation line to talk through your concerns: (07797 713411).



Self-care checklist

This checklist is for anyone who is touched by the Critical Incident, whether directly or indirectly, e.g. family, friends - all should consider their own needs.

Ideally find someone to talk to (colleague, friend, and partner) both for support and sharing of experiences. If there is no one, it may be helpful to sit quietly and go over the events in as much detail as possible. Carry out your own debrief in drawn/written form.

Be aware that you may experience physical and emotional effects such as: fatigue, anxiety, depression, irritability, aggression, anger, etc., which are normal reactions.

- Be gentle with yourself! Remember that we can't 'fix' everything and we are bound to feel helpless at times. Caring and being there are sometimes more important than doing.
- Give support, encouragement and praise to loved ones and learn to accept it in return.
- At the end of each day, focus on a positive thing that occurred during the day.
- Take time to care for yourself, and engage in hobbies or relaxing activities.

If you feel you are continuing to have intrusive thoughts about the event and these feelings are not lessening after a few weeks, you may need some more support. Your GP may be able to signpost you to relevant help.

Taking Care of Well-being: advice for children and young people

- Give yourself a fear reality check. It's normal to be worried about your safety and your family's safety; even though you may be observing all the guidelines and advice given..
- Share your feelings. Anger, sadness, fear, and numbness are some of the reactions you might have. Don't be embarrassed or afraid to express how you feel. Just talking and sharing your feelings with your parents, friends, teachers, and others can help them and help you.
- Take care of yourself. Losing sleep, not eating, and worrying too much can make you sick. As much as possible, try to get enough sleep, eat right, exercise, and keep a normal routine. It may be hard to do, but it can keep you healthy and better able to handle a tough time.
- Limit the time you spend watching the news. It's good to be informed about what's happening, but spending hours watching the news reports can make you feel more anxious and sad.
- Be respectful of others. When out and about during the Covid-19 response for example, you may observe others not adhering to the guidance about social distancing, try not to give into negative feelings towards them.
- Keep in touch with friends and loved ones via your preferred platforms for communication, connecting with others to share and talk through your feelings may be helpful during this challenging time.
- Get additional support. A traumatic event can cause strong reactions, but if your feelings make it impossible for you to function and do normal things, like go to school, it's time to seek additional help. Turn to a parent, teacher, religious leader, or guidance counsellor, so you can get the help you need.



Resources and activities to share with children

Memory Jar—Children can write or draw special memories, thoughts, wishes, hopes or worries fears. The activity provides an opportunity to explore feelings through a fun activity.

Stone Painting - Suitable for primary and secondary age children. Pebbles can be decorated using paints or coloured pens. Sharing a creative activity together with parents can provide an opportunity for children to share their feelings.

Comfort Box—Through this activity children and young people are able to explore memories. Collecting photos, pictures or special items to help remember good times or a particular person.

Making positive affirmation cards—Allow children to write positive affirmations that are personal to them.

Rhythmic movement

Balls (rolling them back and forth along the floor to each other, bouncing them, throwing them to each other).

Clapping games (repetitive activities – you can ‘teach’ and the child can ‘teach’).

Drumming (copy me rhythms, turn taking, opportunity to ‘lead the adult’).

These activities allow children to become engrossed in a fun movement activity which is engaging and fun at the same time as promoting relaxation and positive well-being.



Calm space

Provide a place to be calm and relax such as a ‘peaceful corner’, where children or young people take time out in a quiet place to regain composure and reduce stimulation.

Sometimes having a cuddly soft toy, or favourite toy, a range of picture books with a focus on well-being, music or a jigsaw puzzle, or even plasticine where agitated hands can work, are calming activities.

For older children, spending time in a calm space with a beanbag or soft cushions to chill out with music, or creative arts are all strategies that young people have found useful.

Mindfulness

This is a gentle mindfulness activity. It is a simple body scan script. All that is needed is a quiet space to sit and enjoy.



Ice into water body scan.mp3

Reading resources

Reading and sharing books is a helpful way to open up conversations about feelings. This is a suggested Reading List to use with children and young people (a more comprehensive list is available on the Winston's Wish website).

Reading Well for children provides quality-assured information, stories and advice to support children's mental health and wellbeing. The booklist is targeted at children in Key Stage 2 (aged 7-11), but includes titles aimed at a wide range of reading levels to support less confident readers: <https://reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on->

Books for children under 5 years

I Miss You - A First Look at Death, P. Thomas ISBN 0764117645

Goodbye Mousie, R.H. Harris ISBN 978-0689871344

Goodbye Grandma, D. Brauna ISBN 1405219017

Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine: Your Activity Book to Help When Someone Has Died, Crossley and Sheppard ISBN-10: 1869890582

The Day the Sea Went Out and Never Came Back: A Story for Children Who Have Lost Someone They Love, M. Sunderland ISBN-13: 978-0863884634

The Invisible String, P. Karst

The Invisible String Workbook, Creative Activities to Comfort, Calm and Connect, D. Wyss

Michaels Rosen's Sad Book, M. Rosen

Books for children aged 5—8 years

Badgers Parting Gifts, S. Varley ISBN 978-0006643173

Always and Forever, A. Durant ISBN 978-0552548779

Flamingo Dream, D.J. Napoli ISBN 978-0688167967 (About a father who is ill then dies)

The Sunshine Cat, M. Moss ISBN 978-1841215679 (A child's cat gets killed in a road accident)

When Dinosaurs die, L.K. Brown and M. Brown ISBN 031611955 (A factual book exploring issues about why someone dies and feelings about death)

Books for children aged 9—12 years

Michael Rosen's SAD BOOK, M. Rosen ISBN 978-1406313161 (Refers to Michael Rosen's son dying and how it affects him)

Milly's Bug Nut, J. Janey ISBN 978-0-9539123-4-6 (About a girl whose father dies)

Water Bugs and Dragonflies, D. Stickney ISBN 978-0264674414 (A pocket book explaining death)

What on Earth to do when someone dies, T. Romain ISBN 978-1575420554

Books for young people aged 13–16

Help for the Hard Times, E. Hipp ISBN 1-56838-085-5 (Refers to different types of loss and grief and skills to help teenagers)

The Spying Game, P. Moon ISBN 978-1842750049 (About a boy whose father dies and reveals the boys response)

Vicky Angel, J. Wilson ISBN 978-0440865896 (A girl's friend is run over and killed)

Straight Talk about Death for Teenagers: How to Cope with Losing Someone you Love, E.A. Grollman ISBN 978-0807025017

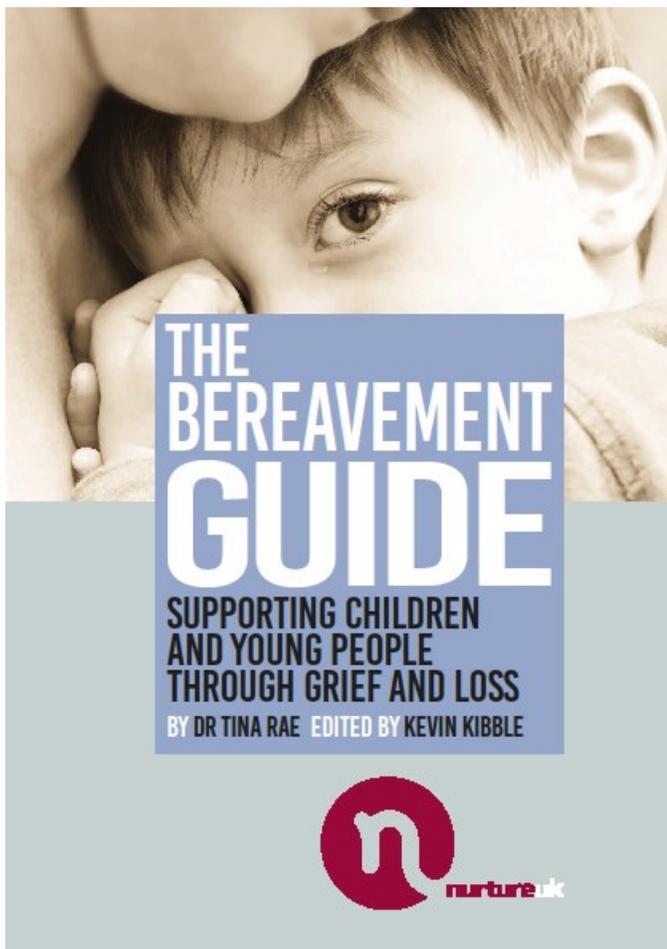
Books for teachers and parents

Help is at Hand: Support after someone may have died by suicide.

Published by States of Jersey, 2016



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Videos

This video shows a group of secondary aged friends talk about their thoughts on loss and bereavement.

Video - Coping with loss featuring Niki 'n' Sammy. Childline Publisher NSPCC (2017)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_XVBDhYuR0 -



Bereavement charities—Jersey

Jersey Hospice Care - Community Bereavement Service, 01534 876555
www.jerseyhospicecare.com

Mind Jersey—0800 7359404
www.mindjersey.org

Childline—0800 1111, www.childline.org

Samaritans—116 123, www.samaritans.org

Bereavement charities—UK

Jeremiah's Journey—Support for children, young people and their families when they are facing grief: www.jeremiahsjourney.org.uk

Young minds—Advice and mental health support: www.youngminds.org.uk

Childline 0800 1111, www.childline.org

Kooth—Free counselling and support, www.kooth.com

4 mental health – new resource to help you find ways to feel a bit calmer and for ideas to help you cope - www.learn.4mentalhealth.com

Cruse Bereavement Care—0800 808 1677
www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Youth website of CRUSE—Website designed for young people by young people.
www.hopeagain.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends UK—Support for siblings. www.tcfsiblingsupport.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK - supports families when a child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement. <https://childbereavementuk.org>

Winston's Wish - Charity for bereaved children: www.winstonswish.org.uk

Marie Curie—0800 090 2309
www.mariecurie.org.uk