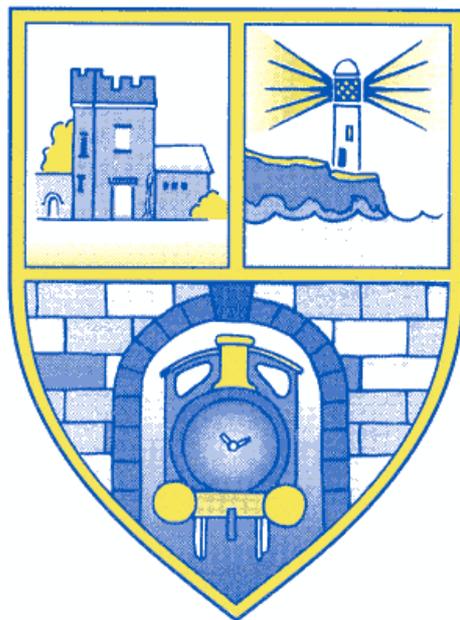


Whitehead Primary School and Nursery Unit

“Learning & Growing Together”



Managing a Critical Incident

Rationale

The purpose of this policy is to outline a strategy which will enable the staff of Whitehead PS & Nursery Unit to:

- Prepare for a critical incident and to ensure effective management in a difficult situation.
- Have a general plan to hand which outlines the steps that need to be taken during a critical incident.

Aims

- To recognise which incidents may be critical for the school community.
- To respond to a critical incident in an informed manner.
- Create a positive, open, communicative climate where the needs of staff and pupils are met in critical incident situations.
- Create a safe school environment whereby the physical, social and psychological health of pupils and staff is prioritised.
- Outline, monitor and review the management plans for dealing with different emergency situations.
- Promote active coping skills within the curriculum.
- Establish positive working relationships and dialogue with outside agencies, thus enabling full and effective collaboration in the event of a critical incident.

What is a Critical Incident?

“A critical Incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of that school” (I matter, A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools).

The Critical Incident Management Team

This team will consist of members of the School Leadership Team and the Chair of the Board of Governors. The Principal will lead the team and in his absence the team will be led by the Vice Principal.

Before a Critical Incident

All staff will be aware of:

- Who is on the Critical Incident Management Team.
- The “Managing a Critical Incident Policy”
- The document “I Matter, A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools”

During a Critical Incident

The Team Leader will find out the facts and assess its significance to the school and if necessary inform the Critical Incident Management Team. The Team Leader will instigate the Critical Incident

Management Plan. The following key tasks will be undertaken:

- Assess the ongoing danger and take necessary action eg evacuation / first aid / emergency services.
- Allocate roles to staff members
- Establish a central information point (most likely the school office)
- Set up a dedicated phone line
- Inform key people and seek support as appropriate / link with other relevant agencies
- Brief all staff
- Inform all pupils
- Inform all parents
- Prepare a media statement if appropriate
- Assess the initial impact of the critical incident on staff and pupils
- Debrief staff – End of day session
- Meet with the Critical Incident Management Team

Following a Critical Incident

The Critical Management Team led by the team leader will:

- Arrange any necessary support for pupils, bereaved families and staff.
- Consider possible memorials and commemorations.
- Review the Critical Incident Management Plan.

All members of staff have a key role in working alongside the Critical Management Team before a critical incident by ensuring that they are aware of this policy and of the document, “I Matter, A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools.”

In addition, it is vital both during and following a critical incident to ensure that normal routines are resumed as quickly as possible and that all pupils and staff are afforded the appropriate levels of support.

“I Matter, A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools” can be accessed at www.deni.gov.uk

The most relevant appendices for staff are included in this policy.

Appendix 1

Appendix 2

Appendix 3

Appendix 4

Appendix 5

Appendix 6

Appendix 7

Appendix 8

Last reviewed: August 2018

Next review: December 2020

APPENDIX 1

What types of critical incidents can affect a school?

Incidents that have affected schools:

- Sudden death of pupil or member of staff;
- Disappearance of a pupil or member of staff;
- Death or injury of a pupil or staff member on a school outing;
- Severe injury to pupil or staff member as a result of road traffic accident;
- Serious assault on pupil or staff member in school;
- Violent/disturbed intruder on school premises during school day;
- Serious damage to school building or property through fire, flood or vandalism;
- Civil disturbance in local community;
- Pupil with contagious illness;
- Immediate evacuation of the school with no likelihood of return for a number of hours.

APPENDIX 2

BREAKING THE NEWS TO PUPILS

Before telling the pupils about an incident, consideration needs to be given to issuing the “Information sheet for Pupils” and allowing time for discussion.

If the incident involves the disappearance or sudden death of a pupil or member of staff it is important to consider the wishes of the family and remember their right to privacy.

Teachers should relay the information, agreed at the staff briefing, to pupils at school - preferably at the same time. Relaying the information to vulnerable pupils and pupils absent from school also needs to be considered. Any news should contain appropriate language and factual information only with clear, concise, bite size explanations delivered in a calm manner.

REMEMBER

Be patient - you may have to repeat the information many times. Be honest, specific and straightforward - it is acceptable to say that you do not have all the answers. Be available for the pupils. Monitor initial reactions.

Allow time for pupils to discuss their feelings. Provide reassurance and information about the school support which is available. Inform pupils of a designated area should they be unable to stay in class. Monitor ongoing and developing reactions. Refer for additional support if in doubt.

Share your own feelings, if appropriate; acknowledge the pupils’ feelings: if necessary, use pictures and social stories to aid understanding.

Be prepared that a pupil may come back and ask more questions.

Be proactive: if you can, have information ready for possible questions. Assure pupils they will be kept updated.

APPENDIX 3

PUPILS' UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH

Children and young people's understanding of death will depend on their cognitive and developmental stage. They will revisit the loss as they mature, reach significant milestones and become more able to talk about their experiences and questions in relation to death. Children and young people with learning difficulties will progress through the developmental stages at a slower pace or indeed may remain at an early stage in their understanding of death. Children and young people do experience similar feelings to adults following a death but often express their feelings differently depending on their developmental age.

Age	Concept of Death	Possible Reactions
2 to 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Death seen as reversible• May feel they have caused the death• Magical thinking - make up fantasies to fill gaps in knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fears abandonment and separation• Loud protest• Despair• Indignant at changes in patterns or routine• Sleep problems• May revert to "baby" behaviours
5 to 11 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More exposure to death and understanding of death as permanent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Withdrawal, sadness, loneliness, depression• Anger, guilt, temper tantrums, nightmares• Behaviour, learning or school problems• Perfect child, brave and in control• May become preoccupied with death
Over 11 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Death permanent• Denial - it can't happen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Withdrawal, sadness, depression, loneliness• Anger, rejection, guilt• Joking, sarcasm• Dependence or regressing to younger age• Insecurity, low self-esteem

APPENDIX 4

DEATH BY SUSPECTED SUICIDE

1. The term suicide should not be used by a school until it is determined by the Coroner's Office. Where an inquest is required it may be a considerable period of time after the death.
2. When providing support for vulnerable pupils, it would be prudent to make a working assumption of suicide, if all reasonable indicators suggest that this might be the case. Pupils and members of the community may be inclined to describe a death as a suicide before this has been established. Phrases such as 'tragic event' or 'sudden death' should be used by the school when talking to pupils.
3. In the aftermath of a sudden death within the school community pupils' vulnerability may increase. Teachers should realise that some pupils may develop suicide ideation and/or self harm. Staff need to be proactive in identifying and monitoring these pupils. Pupils considered to be 'at risk' should be immediately referred to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection who will then notify parents and advise them of the referral pathway to obtain support for their child. This will include the child's doctor and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
4. Schools should maintain contact with parents to ensure that appropriate action has been taken to protect and support the pupil. Careful records should be kept and securely stored as set out in the school's data protection guidelines. Action must also be taken to identify other at risk groups in the school, including close friends and relatives and to direct them to appropriate support. Information for parents can be found at Appendix 14. At any time parents, school staff or pupils can contact the "Lifeline 24/7" crisis response helpline service (Tel: 0808 808 8000).
5. Where there appears to be an emerging cluster of perceived suicides in a school or a number of schools in close proximity, the Education Authority's Critical Incident Response Teams will liaise with the relevant Health and Social Care Trusts. This

coordinated response will ensure an appropriate community response to the situation while minimising sensationalism and avoiding the glamorising of suicidal behaviour.

6. As with any death, schools may wish to remember the person who has died and to pay tribute to their memory. When an apparent suicide has occurred, schools should be careful to remember the person without condoning the means of death. It is important that events are reported in a sensitive and measured way so that other vulnerable young people are not put at risk. The language used is very important.

7. Schools should remember to be vigilant around the time of the inquest, court case and the anniversary of a death and to access any support services as may be required.

GUIDELINES FOR STAFF

Your Responsibilities

You have two major responsibilities:

1. To respond with empathy and in a non-judgemental way to the pupil in need.
2. To follow the usual safeguarding procedures with an appropriate referral to ensure the pupil's safety.

Responding to a Distressed Pupil

- **Listen.** It can be very difficult for a young person to disclose distress so it is essential that he/she is given time and attention. Privacy is also important.
- **Take it seriously.** Disclosures of distress should never be minimised. The young person should be taken seriously but the adult should not express alarm. The young person needs to feel safe and have confidence in adults.
- **Accept the possibility of suicidal thoughts.** These feelings are real and should not be dismissed.
- **Do NOT promise confidentiality.** Ensure that the young person knows that the information will be handled sensitively but that it must be shared with others to safeguard them.
- **Show a caring attitude.** It is acceptable to express care for the young person and a commitment to their well-being.
- **Be open.** If suicidal intent is suspected it is appropriate to ask the young person

whether they are thinking of harming themselves and have any plans.

- **Supervise closely.** Keep the pupil with you until you can deliver them to the care of the Designated Teacher for Child Protection (or appropriate alternative). Sometimes it is more helpful for the teacher to whom the pupil expressed their distress to be the one who stays with him or her while the designated teacher makes safeguarding arrangements.

Response to Suicide Ideation Disclosure

The Designated Teacher for Child Protection (or appropriate alternative) should ensure that the pupil is safeguarded by doing the following:

Continue to supervise closely. The pupil should not be left unsupervised at this stage.

Contact parents. Parents should be advised of the content of the disclosure and the school's concern and asked to take the child or young person to the doctor for an 'emergency mental state assessment' and potential referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Safely hand over the young person into the care of parents. Parents should be advised to supervise very closely.

Contact the young person's doctor. It may be helpful if schools also contact the doctor directly to inform him/her of the concerns.

If the above is not possible. If the school cannot safely deliver the young person into the care of parents or has concerns that appropriate support will not be sought/provided, it is possible for school staff, acting in loco parentis, to bring a child or young person directly to an Accident and Emergency Department.

Follow-up. The Designated Teacher (or other member of staff) should remain in contact with parents and plan to support the young person upon return to school. In planning to support the young person, the school should consider seeking medical/psychiatric advice.

Available Support

1. School's Key Contact for Pastoral Care
2. Independent Counselling Service for Schools
3. Lifeline – 0808 808 8000

Lifeline offers immediate help over the phone 24/7. It is a helpline service for those experiencing distress or despair and deals with issues such as suicide, self-harm, abuse, trauma, depression and anxiety. Pupils can phone directly for individual counselling. Lifeline can also put an individual in touch with follow-up services to ensure the best

possible response to meet individual needs. Lifeline also gives support and guidance to families and carers, concerned friends, professionals, teachers, youth workers, clergy, faith workers and communities about how to support a young person who may be at risk. A number of other agencies provides support to pupils and others. These include:

- NSPCC - 0808 800 5000
- Samaritans - 0845 790 9090
- Childline - 0800 1111

APPENDIX 5

HOW TO SUPPORT A PUPIL DURING A TIME OF CRISIS

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.

THINKING / FEELINGS

Disbelief

Anger

Confusion

Fear

Inability to take in information

Sadness

Talking: repeating what they have experienced/heard

Frightened

Irritable

Nightmares

Overwhelmed

Thinking that they cannot cope

Guilty

Lack of concentration

Worried

Spending a lot of time thinking of what has happened

Easily upset

BEHAVIOURS / PHYSICAL COMPLAINTS

Panic

Cold and shivery

Anxiety

Unable to rest or settle

Crying

Hyper-vigilant

Regression

Feeling sick/knot in stomach

Withdrawal

Loss of appetite

Aggression/argumentative

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 people 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.

- On a day to day basis it provides support and a social network for the pupil.
- At a time of a crisis, when pupils may be experiencing insecurity and change, it offers security and containment.
- Attending school helps to keep a routine and maintain a regular daily pattern.
- The way staff respond to a pupil can significantly affect the outcome of their experience. So staff reactions are very important.

- 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 do not allow 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 Authority's 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.

APPENDIX 6

RESPONDING TO PUPILS' QUESTIONS FOLLOWING A SUDDEN DEATH

1. It can be very difficult to respond to questions from children following a sudden death especially when the member of staff is also shocked and bereaved. Many factors will influence a pupil's idea of death - their developmental stage, their experiences, their ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, and their personal way of seeing things.
2. It is useful to agree a 'script' for all staff. The advantages of this are that staff will have a form of words to use so they are not caught unawares and that pupils get to hear a reassuring message over and over again. This is particularly reassuring and helpful to young pupils or pupils with special needs when processing the information.
3. Some questions will reveal that children feel insecure about whether the adults in their lives will be around to look after them. Reassure them that even though nobody knows the future, they can be sure that there will always be reliable adults to look after them.
4. It is not unusual for young children to ask the same question again and again. Repeating questions and getting answers helps the child understand and adjust to the loss of someone loved.
5. Sometimes children become very interested in physical details. Keep the reply very simple and factual. Repeat it as often as necessary and do not be drawn into giving further details. Be careful not to use euphemisms such as 'sleep' or 'went away' for death. Keep it simple, factual and clear. Younger children find it difficult to understand the permanence of death. Euphemisms will only make it worse.
6. When answering questions about death, tell a pupil only what he or she is capable of understanding. There is no need to be evasive, but modify explanations to what the pupil can comprehend; use language the pupil can understand. What is said is important, but the manner in which it is said has even greater significance. Be aware of voice tone. Try to answer the questions in a matter-of-fact way without too much emotion.

Suggested Answers to Certain Questions

Question: Why did _____ die?

Answer: "There are some things we understand and some things we don't understand. We do/don't know exactly why _____ died. The doctors have told us the reason was _____."

Question: Why Do People Die?

Answer: Dying is a natural part of life. All living things like plants, animals and people are special parts of the natural world. Nature almost always gives us long, healthy lives. Like all things in nature, after many years people grow old and reach the end of life. This is called death.

Question: Is Death Like Sleeping?

Answer: No. Dying is not like sleeping at all. People sleep to rest and stay healthy. Sleep gives hard working parts of our body time to build up strength again. Think of how good you feel after you sleep. You feel so good because your body is rested and ready for another day. When someone dies, their body stops working. It is not resting any more. Its job is over.

APPENDIX 7

A PUPIL RETURNING TO SCHOOL AFTER BEREAVEMENT

Returning to school after bereavement can be difficult for a bereaved pupil. It can also be difficult for peers and staff to know how best to support the pupil. The circumstances of the bereavement and the age and developmental stage of the pupil will determine the approach used by teachers.

The following advice may be helpful in planning a positive return to school

1. Speak to the bereaved pupil. Check how he/she feels about coming back to school and what he/she may want to happen. Discuss the support that will be available. Speak to the parents to find out what they may want.
2. Discuss with class peers how they feel and how they can support the pupil. Discuss normal grief reactions. Encourage them to share their feelings and experiences of bereavement and how they coped. They may have sent cards or messages.
3. Ask a group of friends to be supportive during the first days following the return to school.
4. Consider a phased return. Plan for the day of the return of the pupil with a key member of staff taking the lead. When the pupil comes back to school it is important to acknowledge the loss. You may wish to say something like "I am/we are sorry that _____ died. I/We know you are sad and I/we want to support you at this time".
5. Consider giving the pupil age appropriate information on normal bereavement responses and grief reactions.
6. Allow for possible changes in emotions, behaviours, concentration, and work levels. All teachers need to be made aware.
7. Allow for "time out" when the pupil wants to be in a quiet place or to talk with a school counsellor, pastoral care teacher or another member of staff.
8. Carry on normal routines with normal approaches to discipline, with sensitivity.

