



Gloucestershire
Safeguarding Children
Board

Gloucestershire
Safeguarding Children
Board

www.gscb.org.uk

Unexpected or Traumatic Death of a pupil/child

**Comprehensive Guide for Educational Settings and
Early Years Providers**

Published April 2012
Amended July 2013
Amended December 2014
Amended August 2016
Amended February 2017

Foreword:

This pack has been developed by the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) in conjunction with the Safeguarding in Education and Learning Group. CDOP reports directly to the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board (GSCB). To assist with the making of this pack, information has been gathered from head teachers who have experienced a traumatic death (suicide) or unexpected death of a pupil, the Child Death Overview Panel, Health services, the Educational Psychology Service and research currently available

The purpose of the pack is to provide a comprehensive guide to reacting to a child's traumatic death or a sudden death to include:

- Checklist of things to consider
- Immediate assistance available
- Support for families, pupils and staff
- Measures to help prevent further tragedies

When there is a child death in any circumstance, the school, preschool or educational setting will play an essential role in assisting the bereaved family, the child or young person's friends and the staff who worked closely with them. It is hoped that this pack will be a useful resource to call on in the most stressful (but hopefully rarest) of times.

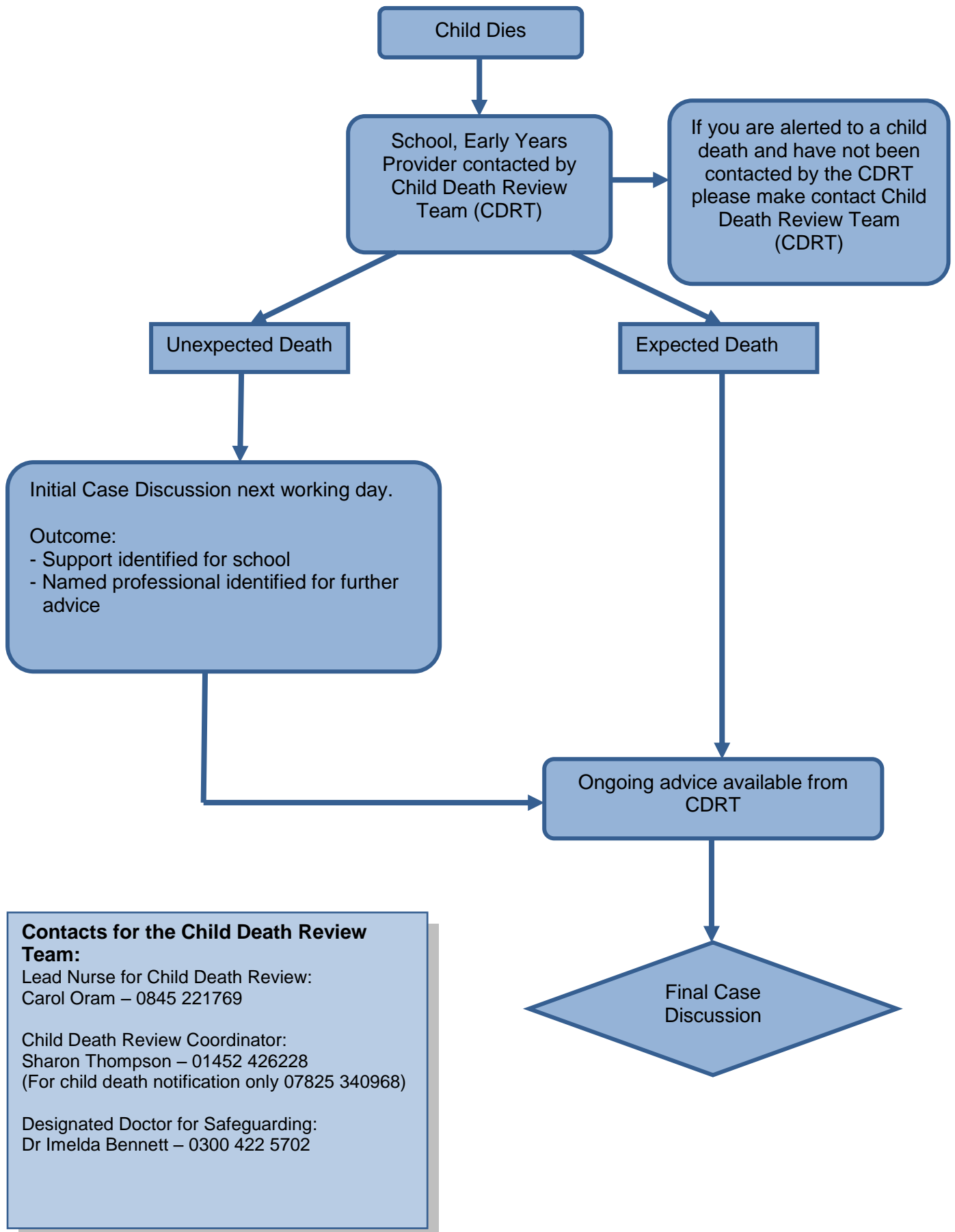
1.0 Child Death Review Process

Each death of a child is a tragedy for his or her family (including any siblings), and subsequent enquiries/investigations should keep an appropriate balance between forensic and medical requirements and the family's need for support. A minority of unexpected deaths are the consequence of abuse or neglect or are found to have abuse or neglect as an associated factor. In all cases, enquiries should seek to understand the reasons for the child's death, address the possible needs of other children in the household, the needs of all family members, and other children well known to the child. It should also consider any lessons to be learnt about how best to safeguard and promote children's welfare in the future.

This mandatory process (Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2010 and 2015 and March 2015) draws on a number of local and national initiatives including the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths (FSID), Confidential Enquiry into Maternal and Child health (CEMACH), South West Infant Sleep Study (SWISS) together with the current high standard of practice and multi-agency working within Gloucestershire. This has provided the opportunity to establish good practice and working within clear management strategies, enabling a high quality of service to families.

For more information in relation to Gloucestershire's Child Death Review Process please see: A Joint Agency Protocol for Investigation and management in Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children <http://www.gscb.org.uk/article/113300/Child-Death-Review>

1.1 The following flow chart is a brief overview of the process and your role.



1.2 Definitions

Unexpected death

An unexpected death is defined as the death of an infant or child (less than 18 years old) which:

- was not anticipated as a significant possibility 24 hours before the death: or
- where there was a similarly unexpected collapse or incident leading to or precipitating the events which led to the death.

Initial Case Discussion

On the next working day following a child's unexpected death all professionals who have been involved with the child in life or at the time of the death will be invited to attend an Initial Case Discussion in addition to representatives from Social Care, Police (acting on behalf of the Coroner), Health and the Child Death Team. This will be arranged by the Child Death Review Coordinator.

The purpose of this meeting is for information sharing and to discuss plans to support the family and other children or groups who may have been affected by the child's death. It will also determine the need for a home visit (this visit should almost always take place for infants who die unexpectedly). Where a visit is to take place, a decision should also be made about how soon (preferably within 24 hours) and who should attend. It is likely to be a Senior Investigating Police Officer and a Healthcare Professional experienced in responding to unexpected deaths. They may make this visit together or separately and then confer to discuss any additional information which may raise concerns about the possibility of abuse or neglect having contributed to the child's death.

The Child Death Review Coordinator will produce a summary of the Initial Case Discussion which will be shared with the family (if appropriate) and can be retained by agencies on the child's file. (More detailed minutes will be retained by CDRC)

Final Case Discussion

The Designated Paediatrician for Unexpected Deaths or representative will convene and chair a Final Case Discussion following receipt of the final results of the post mortem examination. The meeting should include professionals who knew the child and family and those involved in investigating the death. The purpose of this meeting is to share information to identify the cause of death and / or those factors that may have contributed to the death, and then to plan future care for the family or other children affected by the tragedy. Potential learning points may also be identified which may influence service provision for other children of note, all information will be shared with the Coroner should an inquest be held.

The Child Death Review Coordinator will produce a summary of this meeting which will be shared with the family (if appropriate) and can be retained by agencies on the child's file. (More detailed minutes will be retained by CDRC).

2.0 Guidance for schools/Early Years Providers in the event of the unexpected death of a pupil/child

When a pupil/child dies unexpectedly, staff and pupils will be shocked and distressed. Among other things, unexpected deaths might be due to a sudden illness, a road traffic (or other) accident or abuse. If the death is due to suspected suicide, there will be additional considerations. Staff and pupils are likely to have additional questions and will want to know if they could have done anything to prevent the death (See Chapter 3).

In the event of any death of a pupil, the school/Early Years Provider will be notified by the Child Death Review Team (CDRT) (if not already by parents and pupils) and will be invited to the Initial Case Discussion which will happen on the first working day following the death. This means that if the death occurs over a weekend, the Initial Case Discussion will be held on the Monday and schools/settings have found it very useful to attend this meeting (see above CDRT information).

2.1 Issues to consider immediately:

- **Support for schools/Early Years Providers** - Contact the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) who will prioritise your school/setting and visit immediately to offer assistance. Please note that you do not need to have bought into the EPS Traded Services to access this assistance. Telephone Number 01452 328165.
- **Support for pupils - (See Annex A).** The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) can offer support and advise the school on how best to do this. **(See Annex B & C for Primary Schools and D & E for Secondary Schools and for Early Years Providers).**
- **Check school/setting records and create a family tree** for the pupil/child to ensure that you have recognised any other relatives attending school/setting e.g. siblings who might have different surnames, cousins etc. who will need particular support. Where you know the pupil/child has siblings in another school or attends another setting, contact that school/setting to ensure that they are aware. If the school has information regarding an absent parent, you will need to inform the Child Death Review Team so that they can make sure this parent is included.
- **Consider carefully how you will contact the pupil's/child's family.** This will depend on how well you know the family and the circumstances at the time. Things that schools/settings have found helpful are: having someone with you when you meet the family, possibly a Deputy Head, Class Teacher or Governor. Ensure that you treat both parents equally, don't forget the pupil's father and especially consider this where parents are separated. Be led by what the family wants at this difficult time. Attached at **(Annex F)** is a leaflet for parents on how they might support their child.
- **Consider the pupil's/child's immediate friendship group**, including any boyfriend or girlfriend who will need particular pastoral support. This should also include known friendships in other schools/settings.
- **Use a Critical Incident book** to record phone calls/visitors etc. because this will assist in remembering things and give really clear feedback to CDOP.
- **Support for staff.** Don't overlook the impact on staff. The EPS/School Counsellor can assist you in supporting staff who will require reassurance. Paper materials brought by EPS can help with this and can be discussed with staff either individually or in groups **(See Appendix C & E as above)**

- **Make use of local Charities** who can offer support e.g. Cruise, Samaritans, Winston's Wish (see List). Charity business cards with phone numbers left around the school/setting site can be picked up by pupils, parents and staff alike.
- **Alert your school site team** to be aware of small groups of pupils who or individuals who may wish to leave the school site and who might need some additional support.
- **Contact the Gloucestershire County Council Press Office** on 01452 425093 who will be able to guide you through any press interest. Notify your staff, especially administrative staff of this likelihood and offer them assistance in knowing what to say should there be calls from the press. On-line press releases can be especially damaging to pupils, children and staff particularly when emotive wording is used. Comments pages on websites for press allow outrageous comments from people who did not know the pupil/child. Do not be tempted to react to these but do contact the press office for advice if this becomes a problem. Keep Governors informed of press interest.
- **Counselling:** Remember that children don't necessarily need immediate counselling. They need to know that it's natural to feel grief. If in the longer term they are not coming to terms with this grief then counselling might be appropriate.
- **Consider setting up additional Pastoral Care** and make sure that pupils/children know how to access this. Secondary age pupils are very likely to set up a Facebook account (or similar) to record their thoughts. Ask staff to talk to pupils about this and ensure that they report and request removal of any inappropriate comments.
- **Consider setting up a book of condolence** for pupils, parents and staff to sign. This can be given to the family in slower time (ensure that comments are checked first). Some schools/settings set up a memory box for the family, asking pupils/children and staff to include memories and write them down for the family. Other similar practical ideas might be suggested by the EPS or can be found on the Charity Website at the end of this guidance.
- **Flowers:** It is likely that flowers will be placed perhaps at the school/setting gate or other prominent place. Ensure that these are treated with respect and consider a date when you will collect the cards and remove the flowers, possibly on the day of the funeral but discuss this with parents. The cards could be collected (and checked) before being put together and given to the family.
- **Start thinking about the funeral**
 - Flowers/donations
 - Supply staff to cover staff who wish to attend
 - Safety of pupils who wish to attend (transport). If 6th form pupils wish to attend, consider whether to suggest they do not drive in an agitated state.

2.2 Later considerations:

- **Consider attendance at the funeral.** Key staff members may wish to attend and pupils may also wish to go. It might be helpful to advise pupils that they should have parental consent to attend the funeral (if a school day) and discuss the family's wishes regarding the funeral with them, particularly regarding attendance by school staff and pupils, dress and participation in the funeral itself..
- **Exam results** – talk to family if the pupil has taken exams and results are due after the death. How would they like to receive these?
- **Consider how best to gather the pupil's/child's possessions** and return them to the family. Ensure that lockers/drawers are emptied with respect and items are checked (e.g. exercise books, learning journals) and returned to the family. This needs to be sympathetically and in a planned way, ensure time is allowed for this. Parents might want you to go through possessions with staff.
- **The Coroner's Inquest** will be held within a few months of the death. There is likely to be media interest. Consider who will attend the Inquest and plan what your key messages are and stick to these. The Press Office can give advice. Those who have been through this process have advised that it is not helpful for pupils to attend the Inquest.
- **Parental Requests:** Grieving parents' requests might be difficult to accommodate especially around anniversaries/birthdays etc. For further advice on particular issues that arise, contact the EPS or speak to bereavement Charities (see list) who might be able to offer assistance.

3.0 Additional Considerations in the Case of a Traumatic Death that could be Suicide:

It is important not to talk about a death as being a 'Suicide' until this is confirmed. Usually this does not happen until the Coroner's Inquest; however there might be witnesses to the death or the family might call it a suicide before this time. The traumatic death of a pupil is particularly sensitive and emotive. Staff and pupils will ask themselves if they could have prevented it. In addition to the points in Chapter 2 above, when there is a traumatic death schools also need to consider:

- **Questions from parents.** Some schools have sent a letter home to parents advising of the death of a pupil. School will need to speak to the bereaved parents first and consider this carefully and use caution but where there are suggestions that something in school might have contributed to the traumatic death e.g. bullying or exam pressure, a response from school might be required. Having a high staff ratio at the next parents' evening to assist in answering parental questions might also help. Remember that feelings are long lasting and very strong so such considerations will need to be extended for as long as necessary.

While the fact that a student has died may be disclosed immediately, information about the cause of death should not be disclosed to students until the family has been consulted. If the death has been declared a suicide but the family does not want it disclosed, someone from the school who has a good relationship with the family should be designated to contact them to explain that students are already talking about the death amongst themselves, and that having adults in the school community talk to students about suicide and its causes can help keep students safe. If the family refuses to permit disclosure, school can state, "*The family has requested that information about the cause of death not be shared at this time*" and can

nevertheless use the opportunity to talk with students about the phenomenon of suicide: “*We know there has been a lot of talk about whether this was a suicide death. Since the subject of suicide has been raised, we want to take this opportunity to give you accurate information about suicide in general, ways to prevent it, and how to get help if you or someone you know is feeling depressed or may be suicidal*”.

- **Permanent Memorials.** Advice from charities is that permanent memorials are not beneficial to the school community in the case of a traumatic death which has been deemed to be suicide. This is because they can become a place to visit for any pupil who feels low or inclined towards suicide themselves (see 3.1 below, preventative measures)
- **School's core values** should be reiterated. Suicides are rare but can draw staff in to questioning what the school's core values are. It's important to remember staff might need support and direction (following the lead of the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team on messages and actions agreed). Support may be obtained from Occupational Health, School Nurse, GP, School Counsellor and Charities to assist with this.
- **The age of the pupil.** This can make a great difference to how the school reacts to a suicide. E.g. the difference between a year 8 and a year 13 pupil, how their peer group reacts and how staff react. Seek advice from the Educational Psychology Service.
- **Anniversaries** of any death but especially traumatic deaths or those identified as suicide need to be handled carefully. It is likely that pupils will return to the site of the death. Speak to pupils about being out of school and ensure they feel supported without dwelling on the anniversary. Remember new/key members of staff may not know what has happened and could be unprepared for the reactions of pupils and staff. Make sure new staff are briefed. Check media sites and social media, Facebook in particular, to help gauge the feelings of pupils.

3.1 Preventative measures

Gloucestershire has a Suicide Prevention Strategy which covers a wide range of information. The strategy can be found at www.gscb.org.uk/audit

Copycat suicides are a well-known phenomenon but in Bridgend the tributes left on websites such as Bebo had a significant impact. Friends set up memorial pages where wellwishers posted messages or bought virtual “tablets” in a remembrance wall. David Gunnell, Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Bristol, said that research had shown a connection between reports of suicide in the media and copycat deaths and it was likely that discussions of suicide on websites would have a similar effect. He said: “Young people are more likely to see and read items concerning suicide on the internet than they are in newspapers. One can extrapolate from wider research on responses to newspaper reporting that a medium like Bebo will have an impact on suicidal behaviour in young people.” The school's goal should be to balance the pupils' need to grieve but to limit the risk of inadvertently glamourising the death. It is likely to be necessary to set limits and to keep things as normal as possible but it is important to do so with compassion and sensitivity and to offer creative outlets for grief wherever possible. The EPS will assist with this.

Talking to peer groups about their feelings and the comments they are making is also a way of helping them to prevent feelings escalating to suicide. Schools where this has happened have advised on a pulling together of the school community as a whole. Pupils are very likely to turn to social media sites to transmit news and feelings about the death. Some of this will be correct and some will be rumoured. Memorials are created on line and comments are left.

School might not usually engage in such media sites, but they can be an effective way of disseminating correct information and identifying pupils who are in need of additional support. To the extent possible, social media sites should be monitored (including the deceased's wall or personal profile pages if accessible) for rumours, information about possible gatherings, unkind or inappropriate messages about the deceased, messages that bully or victimise current students and comments that show a pupil might be at potential risk themselves. The school might wish to respond by posting a comment to dispel a rumour or speak to an individual thought to be at risk. Local police might wish to know about a planned gathering, especially late at night.

Suicide warning signs can be difficult to identify and there may be none. However, a list of potential signs are:

- Talking about wanting to die or commit suicide
- Looking for ways to do this such as searching the internet
- Talking about feeling useless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or being a burden to others
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Appearing anxious, or behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing and feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about revenge
- Extreme mood swings.

For more information about suicide prevention, see the Gloucestershire Suicide Prevention Strategy at www.gscb.org.uk/audit

USEFUL CONTACTS:

You will also find some related links on the **Gloucestershire County Council website:**
www.gloucestershire.gov.uk – just search for the following as an exact phrase in the search box.

Educational Psychology Service	http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/eps
Occupational Health	OHU@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Charity Links <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRUSE • Winston's Wish • MIND 	http://www.cruse.org.uk/ http://www.winstonswish.org.uk/ http://www.mind.org.uk/help/advice_lines
Family Liaison Officer – Gloucestershire Police	Family Liaison Officers are appointed in some cases and can assist with contact with the family. For the police control room just dial 101 and listen to the options.
Suicide Prevention and Strategy	www.gscb.org.uk/audit
Safeguarding for Educational Settings	jane.bee@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Media reporting guidelines	http://www.samaritans.org/media-centre/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide/introduction-samaritans-media-guidelines http://www.mediawise.org.uk/
Tackling bullying in Gloucestershire	http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/article/109985/What-to-do-if-you-are-being-bullied
Beyond Fed Up Curriculum	www.ghll.org.uk
CYPS Professional Helpline	01452 894272 (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, excluding Bank Holidays)
Nobody Understand Labels for school planners (available for Yrs 7-13) and primaries on request from:-	georgina.summers@gloucestershire.gov.uk or Telephone: 01452 426320

References:

After a Suicide, A Toolkit for Schools, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, *Suicide Prevention Resource Centre, Education Development Centre*, March 2011.

Gunnell, David, Professor of Epidemiology, University of Bristol, as cited by *Sunday Times*
Jan 2008

Winston's Wish – Schools Information Pack, www.winstonswish.org.uk

Authors:

Jane Bee, Safeguarding Children Development Officer (education)

Inspector Andrew Matheson, Police Community Cohesion

David Gaston, Head Teacher

Jan Courtney, Lead for Children's health and Wellbeing

Matt Baker, Educational Psychology Service

Georgina Summers, Assistant Safeguarding Children Development Officer (education)

ANNEX A

Levels of Support for Schools

LEVEL 1 Bereavement

E.g..

- Death of a pupil/ child/member of staff/parent/carer out of school.
- May be an expected event.
- Generally low impact for majority of pupils/staff.
- Advice for staff regarding bereavement and the normal grieving process

Response: Telephone conversation, possible follow-up visit by service representatives as necessary

LEVEL 2 Critical Incident

E.g.

- A sudden, unexpected event that is distressing to children/pupils and/or staff and is directly experienced or witnessed.
- May involve violence or threat of violence or injury.
- May affect significant numbers of children/pupils/staff.
- Likely to have local impact and media interest

Response: As level 1, plus additional involvement of other agencies as necessary

LEVEL 3 Major Disaster

E.g.

- Large scale disaster affecting the school, Early Years Setting and/or the local community.
- County's Emergency Management Service implement disaster plan.
- E.P.'s response is part of a much larger multi-agency response led by Emergency Management Service.
- National as well as local impact – high media interest.

Response: Service representative in liaison with lead personnel in other agencies

ANNEX A

CRITICAL INCIDENT

Principles of EP Support to Schools

Principles underpinning interventions offered by the EPS

- Early intervention aims to prevent PTSD
- Our involvement is based on a psycho-educational approach and is not counselling e.g. we provide information about possible reactions, identify coping strategies and support networks.
- The wishes of schools and parents will be respected and involvement will be the result of agreement between all parties.
- Support is best given by people that know the children well, supported by other professionals.
- Our initial involvement involves a joint problem solving approach. The nature and extent of the involvement will vary depending on the nature of the incident and the wishes of those most affected.
- We take a staged approach e.g. initial support is for school staff – group work with pupils would only follow later if appropriate.
- Intervention by the Service as a whole will be short term, dealing with the needs of staff and pupils following a critical incident.
- Longer term support will be referred to an appropriate agency, which may be suggested by the school's Educational Psychologist.

Considerations for professionals involved

- Never work alone i.e. in teams of no less than two
- Consider whether personal and professional circumstances mean that it is best not to be involved in supporting a critical incident at this time
- Debriefing following an incident is essential. Educational Psychologists will be offered peer support at both an emotional and professional level following involvement with an incident. This may be taken up on a voluntary basis. It will be the responsibility of the EPS management to arrange suitable support.

Who can I talk to?

Your feelings may be so sad that it may be difficult to talk to someone but sometimes it can be helpful to talk to somebody about how you are feeling.

People you might want to talk to:



Useful Information

You can find some useful information on bereavement from:

Winston's Wish
the charity for bereaved children

www.winstonswish.org.uk
Helpline: 08452 03 04 05

Cruse Bereavement Care

www.rd4u.org.uk
Helpline: 0844 477 9400

Coping with a sudden and upsetting event



Help for primary school pupils

Gloucestershire
Educational
Psychology Service



What might help?

Everyone reacts to upsetting events in a slightly different way and each person finds that there are different things that can help. Some of these suggestions may help you.



Talk to someone



Do a fun activity



Think of a safe way to let out your feeling e.g. thumping a pillow or running really fast

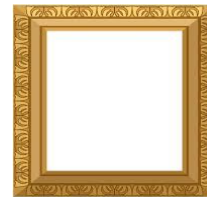


Write or draw

If someone has died, everyone reacts in a different way, and that's O.K.

Remember that you can still laugh and have fun.

It may be helpful to think of a special way to remember the person who has died.



Make a special book



Write a letter, story or poem



Coping with a traumatic event

Guidance for primary school staff

Gloucestershire Educational Psychology Service

Normal reactions to a traumatic event

Following any distressing event it is quite normal to experience a range of reactions. Each person will respond in her/his own way. Students may show **some** of the following:

- Not being able to concentrate or want to do school work or make decisions
- Avoiding places, people or objects which remind them of the incident
- Physical effects such as feeling unwell, headaches, listlessness or over activity
- Nightmares, irritability
- Feelings of guilt and/or responsibility
- Difficulty in accepting the events of how they have been affected by them e.g. Appearing over brave
- Changes in personality e.g. feeling depressed or isolated, becoming irritable or angry
- Needing to go over and over the incident which can test the patience of those closest

These reactions are all common responses and are usually short-lived, e.g. Up to four weeks. The majority of people will get over the experience with the support of family, friends and school

How to help your pupils

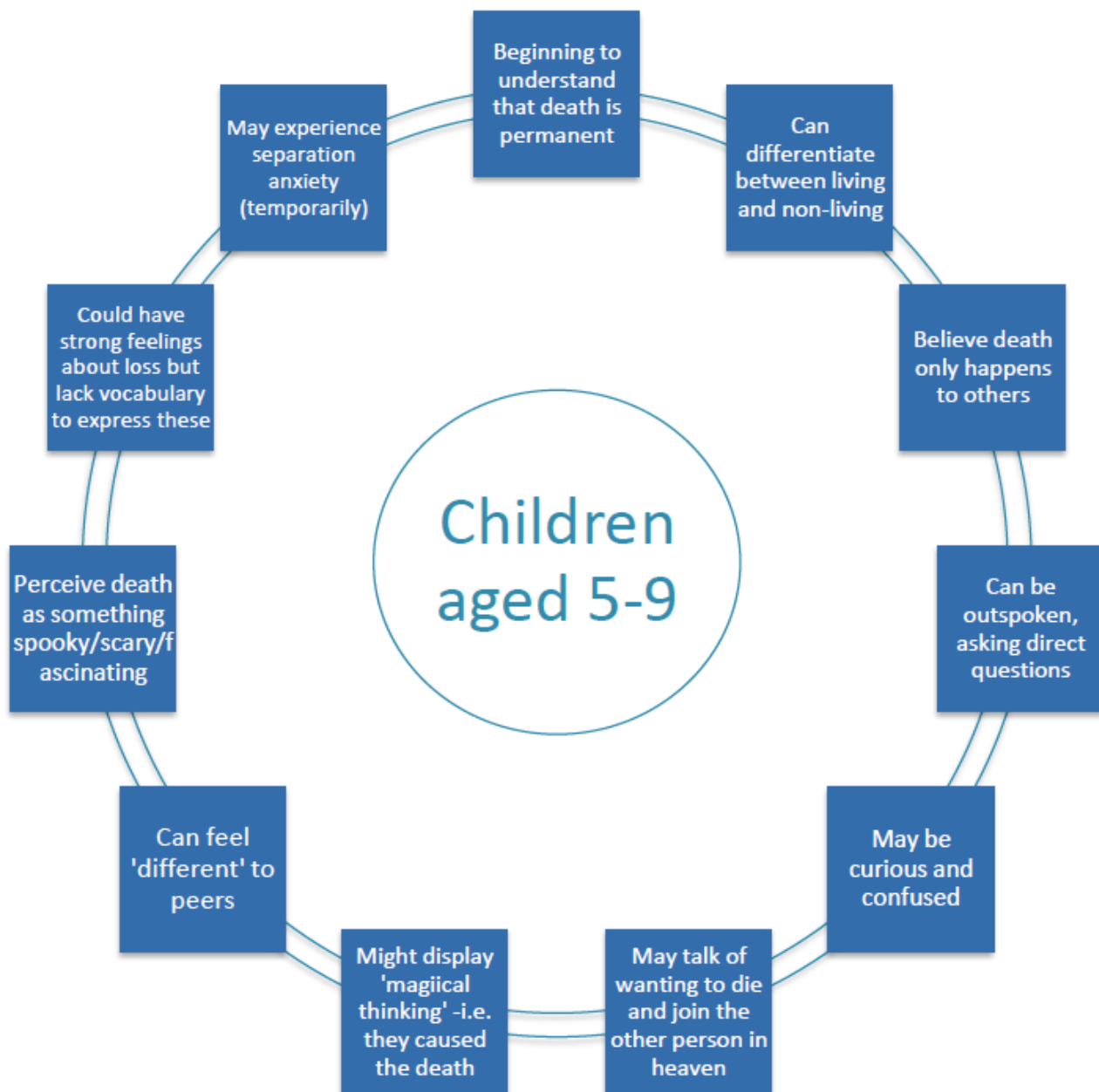
A traumatic event often leaves people feeling confused and unsettled, it is therefore very important to consider the following strategies

- Listen to and try to understand your pupil's views of the event
- Give attention, reassurance and say things simply
- Allow your pupils to talk about the event and express their feeling – give them reassurance and permission to feel upset
- Check children's understanding of the event
- Answer pupil's questions as truthfully as possible
- Maintain daily routines both at home and at school
- Encourage healthy eating, exercise and rest
- Encourage resumption of social activities e.g. clubs
- Let children know that their reactions are as might be expected
- It can help to recall happy memories

Useful book references

- Durant, A. (2004). *Always and forever*. London: Picture Corgi.
- Gilbert, I. (2010). *The little book of bereavement for schools*. London: Crown publishing Ltd.
- Ironside, V. (1996). *The huge bag of worries*. London: Hodder.
- Stokes, J. & Crossley, D. (2008). *A child's grief. Supporting a child when someone in their family has died*. Winstons wish.

Understanding a grieving child



Whilst children aged 9-11 may experience some of the above, they may also:

Fear other losses

Feel a need to participate in rituals

Feel that they need to be brave and not upset their parent(s)

Have intense reactions

Useful Contacts

Winston's Wish
the charity for bereaved children

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Helpline: 08452 03 04 05

Cruse Bereavement Care

www.cruse.org.uk

Helpline: 0844 477 9400

0808 808 1677 (for young people)

Who can I talk to?

Your feelings may be so painful that it is difficult to talk about them.

You might prefer to spend some quiet time alone, but at other times you may feel lonely and want to talk to someone.

You could talk to someone in your family such as parents, carers, siblings, grandparents, aunts or uncles, and although you may find this difficult, sharing your feelings may help you to feel better. Other people to talk to might be friends or a trusted adult e.g. a teacher or activity leader.

Sometimes feelings can be so overwhelming that it is important to talk to someone whose job it is to listen, such as a counsellor. There may already be one of these at your school.

Useful Information

You can find some useful information on bereavement from:

Winston's Wish
the charity for bereaved children

www.winstonswish.org.uk
Helpline: 08452 03 04 05

Cruse Bereavement Care

www.rd4u.org.uk
Helpline: 0844 477 9400

Coping with a sudden and upsetting event



Guidance for secondary pupils

Gloucestershire
Educational
Psychology Service



Coping with a traumatic event: Student guidance

Everyone reacts to upsetting events in a slightly different way and each person finds that there are different things that can help. Some of the suggestions may help you:

- It usually help to talk about how you feel. You are not alone. There are people who can help you. If you feel that you want to talk to your friend, or your parents or your teacher, do so. It is good to talk openly about whatever you are feeling, even if it seems silly.
- There are times when you don't want to talk or think about it. At those times, it is good to do something entirely different. You may want to go out and do something that you enjoy and that is O.K.
- Some people find it helpful to write a diary about that day, and the days that follow. It may be helpful to write or draw things that come to your mind. You don't have to show these to anybody else, unless you really want to.
- Sometime you may just want to be alone. It may help to listen to music.
- Try to keep things as normal as possible. Keep going to school, clubs etc.
- Remember to eat well, exercise and rest when you need to.

Although you will always remember the event, the bad feelings you have had will usually fade after a few weeks. If you continue to be worried make sure that you tell someone who will make sure that you have the support that you need.

Normal reactions to sudden and upsetting events



Do not be surprised if you keep thinking about the incident. You may be asking, “**Why did it happen? What could I have done?**”

At times you may feel **tired** or **sick**, or you may have an **upset stomach**. You may have **aches** and **pains** you can't explain. Sometimes you may be **forgetful**, or **dizzy**, or **daydreamy**. You might get some **bad dreams**, or find it **difficult to go to sleep**. You may make mistakes because you're **not concentrating**, so take extra care. Someone you might feel **very sad or angry**, or **frightened or guilty**.

Everyone reacts in a different way, and you may find that you don't feel any of these things. **That is O.K.**

Coping with a traumatic event

Guidance for secondary school staff

Gloucestershire Educational Psychology Service

Normal reactions to a traumatic event

Following any distressing event it is quite normal to experience a range of reactions. Each person will respond in her/his own way. Students may show **some** of the following:

- Not being able to concentrate or want to do school work or make decisions
- Avoiding places, people or objects which remind them of the incident
- Physical effects such as feeling unwell, headaches, listlessness or over activity
- Nightmares, irritability
- Feelings of guilt and/or responsibility
- Difficulty in accepting the events of how they have been affected by them e.g. Appearing over brave
- Changes in personality e.g. feeling depressed or isolated, becoming irritable or angry
- Needing to go over and over the incident which can test the patience of those closest
- Seeing or hearing the person who has died.

These reactions are all common responses and are usually short-lived, e.g. Up to four weeks. The majority of people will get over the experience with the support of family, friends and school

How to help your pupils

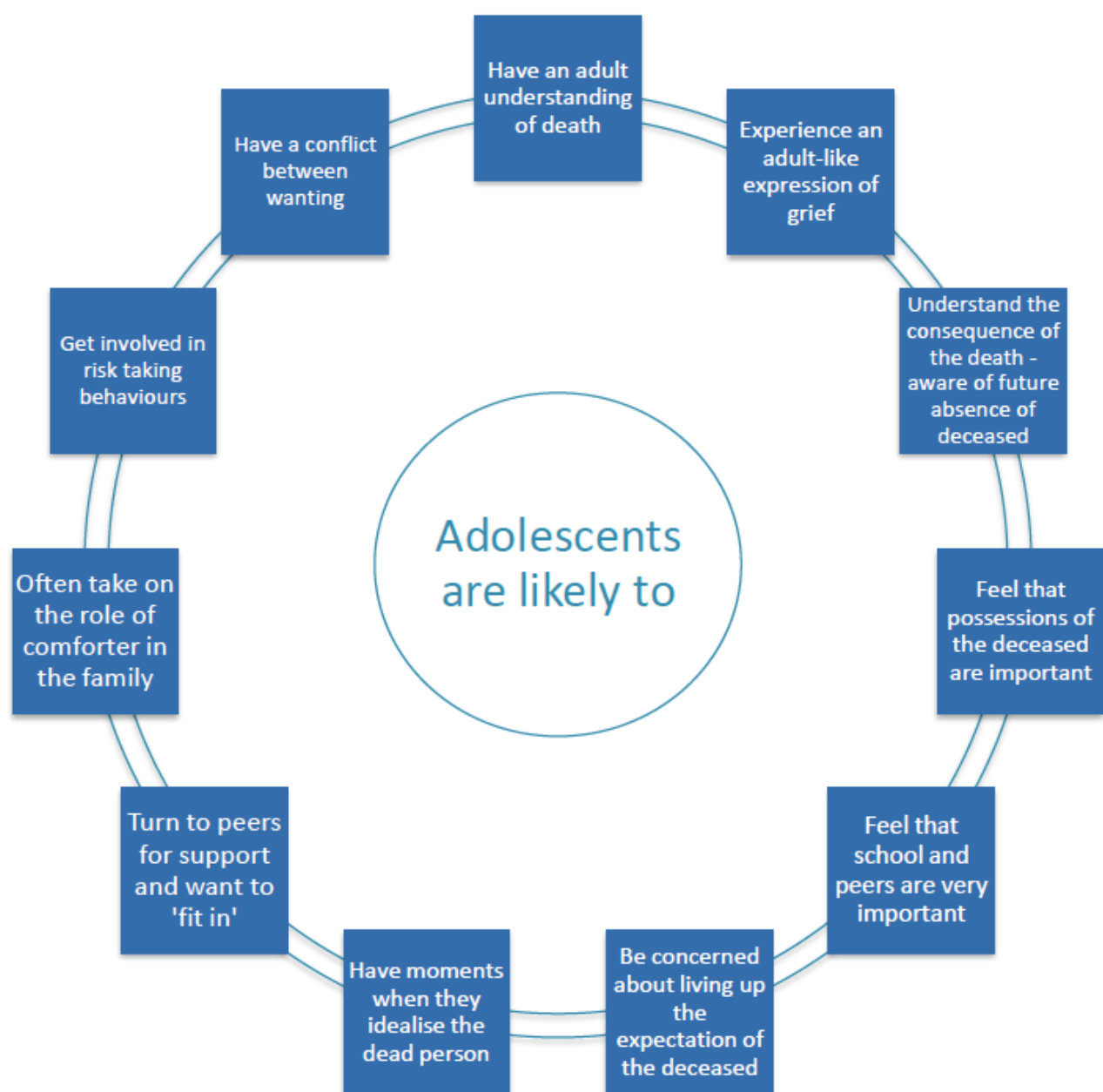
A traumatic event often leaves people feeling confused and unsettled, it is therefore very important to consider the following strategies

- Listen to and try to understand your pupil's views of the event
- Give attention, reassurance and say things simply
- Allow your pupils to talk about the event and express their feeling – give them reassurance and permission to feel upset
- Check children's understanding of the event
- Answer pupil's questions as truthfully as possible
- Maintain daily routines both at home and at school
- Encourage healthy eating, exercise and rest
- Encourage resumption of social activities e.g. clubs
- Let children know that their reactions are as might be expected
- It can help to recall happy memories

Useful book references

- Gilbert, I. (2010). *The little book of bereavement for schools*. London: Crown publishing Ltd.
- Mackinnon, H. (2013). *You just don't understand: supporting bereaved teenagers*. Winston's Wish.
- Rosen, M. (2004). *Michael Rosen's sad book*. London: Walker

Understanding a grieving adolescent



Useful Contacts

Winston's Wish
the charity for bereaved children

www.winstonswish.org.uk

Helpline: 08452 03 04 05

Cruse Bereavement Care

www.cruse.org.uk

Helpline: 0844 477 9400

0808 808 1677 (for young people)

Coping with a traumatic event

Guidance for Parents/Carers How you can help your child

Gloucestershire Educational Psychology Service

This leaflet is for parents and carers whose children have been involved in a sudden, unexpected and distressing event related to school. It includes examples of possible reactions that your child might experience, ways your child might be helped and a list of useful contact.

Normal reactions to a traumatic event

Following any distressing event it is quite normal to experience a range of reactions. Each person will respond in her/his own way. Your child may show **some** of the following

- Not being able to concentrate or want to do school work or make decisions
- Sudden flashbacks which can be caused by related sights, sounds or smells
- Avoiding places, people or objects which remind them of the incident
- Feeling insecure and unsafe
- Physical effects such as feeling unwell, headaches, listlessness or over activity
- Sleep disturbance, nightmares, bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, irritability etc.
- Difficulty in accepting the events or how they have been affected by them e.g. appearing overbrave
- Changes in personality e.g. feeling depressed or isolated, becoming irritable or angry
- Needing to go over and over the incident which can test the patience of those closest
- Seeing or hearing the person who has died.
- Worries that the same event might happen again or happen to them
- A sense of guilt — 'If only I had...'

Your child may be helped at school

To help your child, teachers may set less demanding work or less homework. If several children have been involved in an incident, it is likely that school will give them the opportunity to share their experiences as part of coming to terms with what has happened. This type of session would be led by one of the teachers who may be supported by the Educational Psychologist for the school.

How to help your child

- Listen to and try to understand your child's view of the event
- Give attention, reassurance and physical contact
- Allow your child to talk about the experience and express his/her feelings
- Check your child's understanding of the event
- Answer your child's questions as truthfully as possible
- Respect privacy—do not force your child to talk if they do not want to
- Maintain daily routines at home and school
- Encourage healthy eating, exercise and rest
- Comforting bed-time routines may be particularly helpful
- Encourage resumption of social activities e.g. Clubs
- Let your child know that their feelings are quite normal and whilst the incident may always be an unpleasant memory they will feel better in time
- Think of some of the positive things that have happened e.g. Being brave, being helpful

Supporting a child who has experienced a traumatic event can be stressful for parents/carers. Friends and relatives can be very helpful to adults and children at such times.

The support given, both at home and at school, will generally help to ensure that the reactions to the events are temporary. Although the event will never be forgotten, most children will recover without serious long term effects, with up to four weeks. However, if you continue to have concerns about your child's reactions, you may wish to consider further support.

People who may be able to help

- Your GP
- Your local religious community
- Your child's teacher
- The school nurse
- Voluntary counselling agencies
- The school psychologist

The following may also be helpful:



www.cruse.org.uk
Helpline: 0844 477 9400



www.winstonswish.org.uk
Helpline: 08452 03 04 05



www.samaritans.org.uk
Helpline: 08452 03 04 05