Critical Incidents during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction
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.” Critical incidents vary greatly in magnitude from the expected death of a staff member, to sudden and traumatic incidents such as a stabbing on site.

The COVID-19 pandemic means that there is an increased risk of critical incidents both within Buckinghamshire schools and the wider community. This is coupled with a general increase in levels of anxiety amongst the population owing to the pandemic and associated necessary measures taken by the UK government, including school closures and stringent social distancing rules. Therefore the heightened need to provide emotional and practical support to schools and settings at this time is recognised by all those within Buckinghamshire’s Integrated Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Service (iSEND).

Guiding Principles
In the event of a critical incident, the Buckinghamshire Council’s Educational Psychologists (part of iSEND) will offer support to the school’s management team in order to appropriately manage the event. The approach taken is based on research into best practice and is founded on helping schools manage the immediate aftermath of an event, including advice and support around communication, practical arrangements and managing emotions.

Whilst no two incidents are the same, responses to critical incidents follow a recognised pattern and with time, most children and adults will come to terms with what has happened and recover without the need for professional counselling. Help and support is best given by trusted, familiar adults as and when it is needed. Educational psychologists (EPs) will support schools to facilitate this and be confident in this role.

When an incident occurs, it is important that schools let the local authority know as soon as possible. Please contact eps@buckinghamshire.gov.uk or call on the number 01296 383219.

The school will then be contacted via video call or telephone by a senior member within the Educational Psychology Team, who will help to identify what steps have been taken so far and what support is required.

Critical Incident Support
The school will be assigned a designated educational psychologist, who will be the setting’s key point of contact throughout the critical incident response. This EP will organise the support that is required. The latest government guidance on working during the COVID-19
pandemic will be followed; communication tools such as Skype will be used to promote supportive relationships during enforced remote working.

The precise nature of this will depend on the specific critical incident, but may include:

- Support regarding how to communicate the information to staff, children and parents, including considering the best form of words to express sadness whilst reducing anxiety and possible panic
- Sharing information with staff about typical emotional and behavioural responses to critical incidents (within themselves and children/young people) and how best to manage them
- Providing a focus for students to share feelings, for example use of tutor mentor groups; other school sharing forums
- Identification of, and planning for, vulnerable children
- Advice around practical issues such as memorials and books of condolences

The EP managing the critical incident response will support the setting in the immediate aftermath of the incident, and they will also follow up with the school over subsequent days to support with any issues that arise.

If after a period of time (approximately 1 month) there are members of the school community who are showing signs of continued elevated distress, the EP will discuss this and signpost to further support as appropriate.

**Online Information**

A wide range of resources relating to supporting children, young people and parents can be found on the Buckinghamshire Family Information Service website:


Information specifically for Buckinghamshire schools can be found via SchoolsWeb: [https://schoolsweb.buckscc.gov.uk/covid-19-corona-virus-latest-advice/](https://schoolsweb.buckscc.gov.uk/covid-19-corona-virus-latest-advice/)

Both of these sites are being regularly updated with the latest information.

For further information, please contact:

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