



Emergency Response Initiative Consortium

# Coping After Suicide or Sudden Traumatic Death

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## A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

**PRODUCED BY** EMERGENCY RESPONSE INITIATIVE CONSORTIUM (ERIC)  
**CO-ORDINATED BY** JAMI  
**IN PARTNERSHIP WITH** NORWOOD, CST, JBCS, GRIEF ENCOUNTER, PaJeS



# Introduction

## Emergency Response Initiative Consortium (ERIC)

### Coping After Suicide or Sudden Death : A Guide for Schools

This guide has been adapted by the Emergency Response Initiative Consortium (ERIC) to have universal usage to support best practice and suicide prevention. Schools will need to work with their local partners to create the teams of First Responders suggested in this guide. Advice and guidance can be sought from the ERIC Lead at Jami. They can be contacted by emailing [info@jamiuk.org](mailto:info@jamiuk.org)

ERIC is a partnership of voluntary sector agencies coming together to provide guidance and a face-to-face first responder service to Jewish schools after a student suicide. The consortium is co-ordinated by Jami and comprises of Norwood, CST, JBCS, Grief Encounter and is in partnership with PaJeS.

By being prepared, schools are better placed to prevent suicide and able to respond swiftly and supportively to a school community after a suicide (called postvention).

Due to the way that cause of death is determined by the coroner, we use the phrase 'may have died' by suicide. In some cases, there will be investigation to determine whether the death was suicide or an accident.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. We hope that in the longer term, the clear and practical advice we give will save the school future stress and anguish.

The guide has been structured into five sections which are listed on the contents page then explored in further detail. We have also included handy appendix documents that can be used as proformas or templates.

**Some of the information in this guide will also be transferable to other traumatic and sudden deaths, such as death due to violence or sudden deaths on school premises. In the event of sudden traumatic deaths of this nature, schools can contact us for support and guidance.**

We have also included some guidance for coping with death by suicide of a staff member.

## Acknowledgments

This document was informed by research done by ERIC members and we would like to reference two documents that were invaluable to us:

headspace School Support, Suicide Prevention Toolkit, A guide for secondary schools, headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation Ltd, January 2012, Australia.

After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools (second edition) 2018 by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC), Education Development Center (EDC); Marshall, D. S et al

Thanks to the team from across the consortium partners that have been involved with the development of this document including Philippa Carr (Editor), Margi Abeles, Sue Cohen, Stacey Hart, Saville Kaufman, Rebecca Redhouse, Victoria Stepsky. Alongside those who have helped to review the document over its development Dr Gemma Handelsman, Nicki Cohen, Rabbi Howard Cohen. And thanks to Rabbi David Meyer, Julia Alberga and Jessica Overlander-Kaye for their support with this guide.

This document is intended as a guide and each school will make use of the information in line with their school community's needs and interests. Please do not hesitate to be in touch for further clarification or information about any of the areas included here.

**Revised January 2024, Jami**

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## Section One:

# Being prepared (before a possible suicide)

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## Appointing an in-school Critical Incident Team (CIT)

The team should come together on a regular basis (e.g. once a term) to review policies and share learning. The CIT should put in place training for first responders from within the school community or from schools working together. ERIC can provide first responder training to a selection of staff from within the school community. Jami provides regular twilight briefing for schools on trauma and a short tour of the ERIC Guide. London Borough of Barnet schools can benefit from Youth MHFA (YMHFA) and postvention training. Contact Resilient Schools within the Public Health Directorate.



**Schools should appoint a Critical Incident Team who will manage the crisis.**

### 1. Make up of the team

Critical Incident Teams should consist of five or six people

The team should have a nominated leader and deputy

The team should include the headteacher and other appropriate personnel, such as pastoral care staff and a school administrator

All roles/tasks in the team should be assigned to more than one person in case the lead/other members are not available (see tasks below that will need to be covered)

The team should be able to work effectively under pressure, ensuring they always maintain compassion and empathy

### 2. Establish communication methods of the CIT

Options include:

- WhatsApp group
- School broadcasting system
- Telephone and email contact

### 3. Tasks to be covered by the CIT in the event of a sudden traumatic death that may have been suicide

- Management of the scene of the suicide if this has happened at school
- Caring for and being with other students and staff, including setting up support rooms for students and staff which will enable the ERIC team to work effectively as soon as they arrive
- Handling communications with stakeholders, including all members of the school community (this list will be made in advance by the CIT)
- Informing statutory authorities and the police as necessary
- Dealing with the press and monitoring social media
- Supporting parents by sending them the ERIC leaflet: Helpful Conversations leaflet for Parents and Carers
- Organising a parent event to help contain anxiety
- Supporting the bereaved family (more on page 8)

## Have support networks ready

Identify spaces in the school that could be used as support rooms. These should provide privacy to either the groups or individuals who use them. You might also consider having a common area available for students.

Ensure there is a stock of water, tissues and snacks available in these rooms alongside art materials, such as play dough, felt tip pens etc. which many young people will find comforting to use while they talk to the professionals.

Identify in-house team members who would be able and willing to help in support rooms and communicate with students during a difficult and upsetting time. In-house teams can provide valuable tracking of people using the service by being able to monitor their vulnerability and need.

Ensure that the school recognises signs of grief and distress in neurodivergent young people. Staff should also be aware of complex grief responses in students, which may occur later.

Provide opportunities through the school year to ensure parents/guardians are informed about mental health awareness and resources about local services and national helplines.



**Ensure there is a stock of water, tissues and snacks available alongside art materials.**

## Establish a safe, comforting online presence

A school's online presence can build relationships with all stakeholders to establish trust and confidence across the school community.

After a traumatic incident, people now turn to online media for information and support. The school can dispel rumour and role model appropriate responses to a suicide through their communications. See p.17 for a suggested letter/email to parents after a suicide.



**Ensure mental health awareness education for students and staff is being delivered**

## Ensure suicide prevention procedures are clear to all staff

Suicide prevention is usually managed with a different approach to other aspects of safeguarding, such as abuse. Staff who have trained in YMHFA are able to have a conversation with a young person who may be at risk in order to get them the appropriate support they need. Discuss how suicide prevention sits within your safeguarding framework with safeguarding leads. Put in place a suicide prevention policy to assist with this process and ensure other safeguarding guidance cross references with this.



**Ensure future proofing has been considered**

Consider how you would manage this during busy periods, such as public exams and school holidays.

## Section Two:

# Manage the crisis

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### Tasks immediately after being made aware of a suicide

- Call 999 (if the incident is on site)
- Alert borough contacts, governors and key contacts
- Alert and mobilise the CIT
- Move and comfort any witnesses to safe locations (if on site)
- CIT members should support witnesses until police have taken statements or advised on next steps (if on site)
- Isolate the site of the suicide to prevent students and unauthorised staff from disturbing the scene (if on site)
- Do not move or disturb items from the scene until police have been to the site
- Continue to monitor and comfort any student or staff witnesses (if on site)
- Contact bereaved family, offer condolences and discuss school communications that will go out. See below (p.7-8) for information and suggested wording
- Inform appropriate education services, such as the local borough and Department for Education (This list should be prepared in advance)
- Ensure comfort is provided by CIT to students and staff before professional help arrives
- Plan the management of the support rooms (see further details below)



**This guide aims to support a school to work through the tasks suggested. We understand there will be challenges. Working together as a Critical Incident Team is key.**

### 1–4 hours

#### Taking control of the incident

- INFORM STUDENTS IN SMALL GROUPS - DO NOT CASCADE NEWS OF A SUICIDE IN AN ASSEMBLY
- All students need the opportunity for their own personal responses and to be able to digest the news safely. This is best managed in a smaller group environment where responses can be monitored and supported
- Give staff a script (suggested scripts are available in the appendix) to help them share the news in class groups or, if possible smaller groups
- Have appropriate staff members ready to sit with deeply affected students
- Assign extra support to the affected class
- Collect the belongings of the deceased student for the police and the family. However, do not disturb the student's locker until being given the all clear by police
- Information about the suicide should be differentiated depending on whom it is being shared with as follows:



**Good practice in this area suggests students must be told in small groups not assemblies.**

1. Close friends of the deceased should be spoken to individually or in small groups
2. Parent/carers of students who are deeply impacted by the news should be spoken to regarding arrangements for their children leaving school that day
3. The affected class will require a modified statement of information to those in other year groups in the school. They will want more information about when the event occurred, where and what is being done to support the family/siblings. Do not share details about how the student died. This can be triggering and is not good practice.
4. Students in the same class as a sibling of the deceased will need extra information about how to support their friend when they return to school
5. Other year groups – keep the information brief (see guidance in the appendix of this document)
6. This protocol is recommended to ensure the school has done due diligence to responsibly and safely share the news, even when students may already know what happened through social media. Observing and offering support enables the school to better understand how this tragedy has affected others.

### **Set up support rooms for students and staff**

These must be dedicated spaces. Co-ordinate the use of this service in the first 24 hours and keep it ongoing for about the next three days.

- Put in place a system to monitor who uses the service and ensure staff follow-up with these students, checking in with them as to their wellbeing
- Ensure the class is encouraged to use the support room and offer alternative approaches to trusted teachers if students choose not to use these services
- Ensure affected students particularly those in the same class/friendship group are encouraged to use the support room

### **Keep staff informed**

The leader of the school CIT should inform staff about the news and what has been agreed with the family to share about the incident.

- Inform any staff who may be required to speak to parents and carers and ensure they are given support

### **Initial contact with the bereaved family**

A designated member of the CIT would usually contact the family as soon as possible. It is important to discuss how they wish news of the death to be broken to the school community.

#### **Inform other local schools**

They may have students deeply affected by the suicide in your school and will need to know about the event to be able to put support measures in place.



### **Explain that:**

- Communications will need to go out to the school community. And that you would like to respect their wishes as far as possible. What wording might be used?
- Being able to share sensitive and accurate information about the student's death is very important. It is important to stop misinformation which can hurt people
- If the family are in agreement, the school could use the phrase 'may have died by suicide' for both student and parent communications. When parents do not want this information released to the school community, we have suggested the phrase 'sudden shocking death'
- Ask how they would like to stay in touch with the school in the next few days – text, phone call or email. Respect the family's boundaries and be led by them
- Ensure they are in contact with a police family liaison officer
- Ensure they have the number of the Grief Encounter helpline: 0808 802 0111 (open weekdays 9am-3pm).
- Let them know of the named person from the CIT (if it is not you) who will be their contact person

### **Inform parents/guardians**

Use the suggested letter in the appendix. Giving parents appropriate levels of information can help prevent unnecessary phone contact. Parents may also be impacted by the news and worry about their own children's safety.

- Share the ERIC Helpful Conversation leaflet for Parent and Carers
- Grief Encounter provide a helpline (for bereaved young people) **0808 802 0111**. There may be other appropriate local suicide bereavement support services available that you can also share

### **Identify and step up monitoring of vulnerable students and student absences**

When a death that may have been a suicide happens, there is a "ripple effect". Other students (and staff/parents/governors) who are vulnerable due to their own family history of suicide, or because the individuals have depression, anxiety and other mental health issues, can be deeply affected.

A particular cause for concern will be if students close to the deceased/surviving sibling have their own mental health issues, which can then escalate after news of a possible suicide.

It is vital that the staff team have potential vulnerable students on their radar.

The pastoral team who are in contact with CAMHS and other youth mental health providers as relevant should share news of the suicide to alert services to potential escalation in risk to students currently in psychological assessment and treatment.

Ensure student absences are monitored during this period so that any concerns can be swiftly followed up.

### **Supporting and informing staff**

- Think about vulnerable staff
- Ensure all staff know who they can speak to for support
- Share information about reassignment of any duties to the staff team
- A student death that is sudden and traumatic, such as a death by suicide, can hit staff members very hard. The task of speaking to distressed and worried parents should be shared among a couple of staff members.
- Ensure the CIT come together and support each other/ask for an external facilitator to come in to assist this process



## **Liaise with the family's faith leader**

A member of the CIT should reach out to the bereaved family's faith leader where relevant so that a joined-up approach can be adopted in terms of communications and support.

## **4–24 hours**

### **Ensure all CAMHS services and other youth mental health providers working with other students from your school have been informed**

They may be at higher risk following the suicide of another student, particularly if they are in the same class or year group.

### **Set up a condolences book in a space accessible to all students**

This will enable any student to write a message to help express their feelings. Encourage students to use this to share thoughts, feelings and messages rather than creating spontaneous memorials.

### **Designate a space to place flowers or other markers of respect**

The CIT team may want to consult with relevant students and negotiate the designated place in the school community. Memorials must be time limited e.g. condolence book up to 2 weeks, flowers 2-3 days.



**The school needs to tread a difficult line between being sensitive and compassionate but also protective of others in the student community. Large-scale artwork can quickly turn into an emotive shrine and become triggering for others.**

### **Other important tasks and considerations**

- Send regular emails to staff about plans and key messages for students, alongside resources provided in this pack on speaking to students about suicide
- Follow up contact with the bereaved family after the initial conversation with them and ascertain the family's wishes for staff and students attending the funeral and any ongoing religious observances
- Convey this information to staff, students and parents as appropriate
- Consider staffing levels if the school release staff to attend the funeral
- Consider plans for enabling some students to attend the funeral while others return to school
- School is a safe space and some students will seek out their 'school family' at this time and want to be together in the school environment
- If there is discussion in SLT about any changes to the school day, be aware that closing the school early may lead to some students going home to unsupervised environments, at a time when they are vulnerable due to suicide bereavement
- Monitor social media and counter 'fake news'
- A designated person from CIT should keep up to date with online platforms discussing the traumatic death



## Days 2 and 3

### Return to routine but be prepared for instances of displays of grief by students

#### School routines are important.

They keep students safe and staff contained. Return to normal routines as soon as possible after the death. For most schools, normal routine is resumed a couple of days after the news breaks.

- Use our **future proofing list** in the appendix to pre-empt the knock-on impact of a possible death by suicide. For example, a suicide occurring during exam periods will be particularly difficult for the grieving students, as students close to the deceased will have difficulty with concentration and returning to everyday routines
- Offer to support the family with handling media enquiries
- Ensure regular staff contact and that staff are offered support through appropriate channels, including local provision and national helplines (See appendix)
- Empower team leaders to reach out to their reports and encourage an environment of listening and care for each other
- Ensure monitoring and support of vulnerable students over the next week and then ongoing for the foreseeable future

#### Manage outpouring of student emotions/gestures of grief

Students may wish to demonstrate their grief by coming to school in black or bringing flowers, in order to express feelings and demonstrate support of each other. This is well intentioned but the school needs to contain and manage the outpouring of grief in an appropriate manner.

A sensitive and effective communicator from the CIT should explain this to students in a respectful manner and work with them to support them through this time.



**Work with a group of representative students to explain these principles and work with them to hold boundaries.**

#### Encourage students to use their social media wisely

Class teachers should explain to students how hurtful some messages on social media can be for those who were close to the student. Students should be encouraged to be thoughtful about their posts during this time. Controlling students' social media use is impossible. However, by working with students, schools can use social media to share prevention-orientated messaging, such as key helplines for young people.

#### Change the seating plan in classes if necessary

A few days after the news, seating plans need to be respectfully and sensitively rearranged. Empty chairs, labelled items etc that the deceased used, can be unsettling and evocative for others. Teachers should explain in advance the need to remember the student who died but also return to the everyday so that everyone can learn together safely and securely.

## Section Three:

# Returning to normality

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School routine is important and schools will inevitably return to a flexible 'business as usual'. Some students will take time off school; others will want to be at school. A suicide or traumatic sudden death can create a 'hyper-vigilant' state in some people. Appearance will vary between individuals. Behaviour may appear tense, angry, tearful, or panicky and concentration and academic performance will be impaired.

**Some people can become hyper-vigilant after an event like this.**



## Exams

Consider students taking exams who are deeply impacted by the bereavement. It may be helpful to make special arrangements for them, such as having them in a smaller space where they can be monitored and extending their examination time, recognising their concentration may be impaired. Rest breaks can also be beneficial. Public exams will present more challenges (see also page 22 on future proofing).

## Suicide bereavement

Bereavement after suicide affects everyone differently. Some people will experience an outpouring of grief soon after the news. For others, grief will occur in the days, weeks, months or up to a year after the event. Be prepared to offer support when it is needed.

Use the resources offered in the back of this document to help both staff and parents continue to have supportive conversations with each other and with students.

## Subject content

Ask staff to be mindful of any content being taught to students which may be triggering during this time.



## Suicide bereavement affects everyone differently

### Anniversaries

Plan for anniversaries/reminders of the loss of the student. Events such as annual sports competitions, plays, school trips that the deceased student may have engaged with, will all be reminders of the student's death. Staff need to support each other to be aware of such reminders and anniversaries and seek to reach out to students and guide them to support.

## Section Four:

# Other traumatic events

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### Staff deaths

Members of the staff team are as much a part of the school community as students, and a staff suicide will also have a profound effect. Breaking news of such a death should follow the same guidelines as above i.e. shared in smaller groups rather than mass assemblies.

Support should be made available and the school should consider letting students/staff know about the arrangements in place. There may be some staff absences during a period like this.

### Suicides or traumatic deaths at other schools

When a death is known about in another local school, it is important to ascertain which students may be adversely affected.

Make families aware of what support is available.

Consider which parts of this protocol could be used as a minor protocol to assist in these situations.

# Appendix

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## Emergency response documents

- I. Suggested scripts for teachers disseminating the news to students
- II. Notification to parents
- III. Helpful tips for parents supporting students after a death that may be suicide
- IV. Talking about suicide with young people
- V. Media communications
- VI. Future proofing conversations and plans
- VII. Keep in touch form
- VIII. National helplines and resources

# I. Suggested scripts for teachers disseminating the news to students

**These statements are examples that can be modified by the CIT as needed**

## **Important guidance**

- Whole school assemblies are not appropriate for notifying students of a death by suicide because student reactions are hard to manage in this environment
- Friends closest to the student should be spoken to individually or in small groups
- Notification in class or form groups is recommended
- Different scripts are suggested for students in the year group of the student who may have died by suicide and for students in the remainder of the school population
- Different scripts are suggested depending on the information that is known or can be shared. The death may have been acknowledged as suicide by the family, the cause of death may be unconfirmed or the family may request that the suspected cause of death is not disclosed
- Ideally the teacher speaking to students will have support in the room from another teacher/school counsellor
- Refer to 'How to Talk about Suicide with Young People' information sheet for additional support on notifying students of a death

## **When death by suicide has been confirmed – students in same year group**

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our year.....students, ..... [NAME], has died suddenly. I'm also very sad to tell you that the cause of death may be suicide.<sup>1</sup>

This will be a very difficult time for the family and close friends of .....[NAME]. For a while it may be difficult to think about anything else. There are likely to be many feelings and many questions.

For this reason, a support room has been set up in.....for any students to go to if they feel they can't manage in class over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times for you to talk to if you want to talk. The room is also a place where you can sit and be quiet. The people in the room to support you will be staff from school and professionals from other organisations who have come in to support us this week.

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. Your parents will be informed of the death and will know that you might want to talk with them today or in the coming weeks.

If you are approached by anyone outside the school for comment, please tell them they should speak with .....[NAMED MEMBER OF CIT].

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1. If the family do not want to confirm that the death was due to suicide, you will need to modify this script to: I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our year ..... students,. ..... [NAME] has died suddenly. I am very sad to tell you about this sudden, shocking news.

Some of us may have known..... [NAME] well, and others less well but we may all have strong feelings about this news. Each of us will react to .....[NAME]'s death in our own way and we need to be respectful and sensitive to each other. Please let me, someone in the support room or your parents know if you are worried about your reactions or about anyone else.

### **When death by suicide has been acknowledged – students in general population**

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our Year.....students, [NAME], has died. I'm also very sad to tell you that the cause of death may be suicide.<sup>1</sup>

All of us are thinking about his/her/their family and friends. Some students in school, particularly his/her/their friends in Year ..... will be finding this news very difficult. Other students – not just close friends – may find this very upsetting. There are likely to be many feelings and many questions.

For this reason, a support room has been set up in.....for any students to go to if they feel they can't manage in class over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times for you to talk to if you want to talk. The room is also a place where you can sit and be quiet. The people in the room to support you will be staff from school and professionals from other organisations who have come in to support us this week.

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. Your parents will be informed of the death and will know that you might want to talk with them today or in the coming weeks.

If you are approached by anyone outside the school for comment, please tell them they should speak with .....[NAMED MEMBER OF CIT].

Some of us may have known..... [NAME] well and others less well, but we will all have our own reactions about this news. Each of us will react to ..... [NAME]'s death in our own way and we need to be respectful of and sensitive to each other. Please let me, someone in the support room or your parents know if you are worried about your reactions or about anyone else.

### **When cause of death is unclear regarding a possible suicide – students in year group**

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our year.....students, [NAME], has died. We do not have information about the cause of his/her/their death/ We cannot say at this point anything about the cause of his/her/their death.

We are aware that there has been some talk that this might have been a death by suicide. Rumours may be going around, but please don't spread them. These rumours may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful to his/her/their family and friends.

This will be a very difficult time for the family and close friends of .....[NAME]. For a while it may be difficult to think about anything else. There are likely to be many feelings and many questions.

For this reason, a support room has been set up in.....for any students to go to if they feel they can't manage in class over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times for you to talk to if you want to talk. The room is also a place where you can sit and be quiet. The people in the room to support you will be staff from school and professionals from other organisations who have come in to support us this week.

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1. If the family do not want to confirm that the death was due to suicide, you will need to modify this script to: I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our year ..... students,. ..... [NAME] has died suddenly. I am very sad to tell you about this sudden, shocking news.

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. Your parents will be informed of the death and will know that you might want to talk with them today or in the coming weeks.

If you are approached by anyone outside the school for comment, please tell them they should speak with .....[NAMED MEMBER OF CIT].

Some of us may have known..... [NAME] well and others less well, but we will all have our own reactions about this news. Each of us will react to .....[NAME]'s death in our own way and we need to be respectful of and sensitive to each other. Please let me, someone in the support room or your parents know if you are worried about your reactions or about anyone else.

### **When cause of death is unclear regarding a possible suicide – students in general population**

I am so sorry to tell you all that one of our Year.....students, [NAME], has died. We do not have information about the cause of his/her/their death/ We cannot say anything at this point about the cause of his/her/their death.

We are aware that there has been some talk that this might have been a death by suicide. Rumours may be going around, but please don't spread them. These rumours may turn out to be untrue and can be deeply hurtful to his/her/their family and friends.

All of us are thinking about his/her/their family and friends. Some students in school, particularly his/her/their friends in Year ..... will be finding this news very difficult. Other students – not just close friends – may find this very upsetting, perhaps because it reminds them of another event in their own life or they may not know why they feel the way they do. There are likely to be many feelings and many questions.

For this reason, a support room has been set up in.....for any students to go to if they feel they can't manage in class over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times for you to talk to if you want to talk. The room is also a place where you can sit and be quiet. The people in the room to support you will be staff from school and professionals from other organisations who have come in to support us this week.

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. Your parents will be informed of the death and will know that you might want to talk with them today or in the coming weeks.

If you are approached by anyone outside the school for comment, please tell them they should speak with .....[NAMED MEMBER OF CIT].

Some of us may have known..... [NAME] well and others less well, but we may all have strong feelings about this news. Each of us will react to .....[NAME]'s death in our own way and we need to be respectful of and sensitive to each other. Please let me, someone in the support room or your parents know if you are worried about your reactions or about anyone else.



## II. Notification to parents

**Releasing information about the deceased student should be done with parental consent and the school may have to adjust wording to sudden, shocking death rather than mention suicide.**

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am sorry to tell you that one of our year .... students (name if consent given) has died suddenly. I'm also very sorry to tell you that the cause of death may have been suicide.

All of us are thinking about his/her/their family and friends. Some students in school, particularly his/her/their friends in Year ..... will be finding this news very difficult. Other students – not just close friends – may find this very upsetting. There are likely to be many feelings and many questions.

The school has set up a support room for students where there are people to talk to or a quiet space to sit if it feels too much to be in class. The support room will be staffed by people who have been trained to support young people after a sudden death, or a death that may have been suicide. We are working with (insert the agencies offering support to the school). Please encourage them to use the support room.

The support room will be available for students for ..... (specify time if possible). We will return to normal routines as soon as possible while recognising that some of our students may have responses in the future or be affected by this death for some time.

If other losses or stressful events have occurred in a student's life, it may be more difficult to manage the news of this death. If after a few weeks it is difficult to get back to regular life and routines, help is available in and outside school from GPs, school counsellors/therapists and other agencies. It can take some time for shock to subside and reactions may occur some weeks or months after hearing news of a suicide. If your child or young person is already accessing mental health services, please do let the professionals involved in their care know about this death. It is also advisable that you let us know if your child is currently under the care of CAMHS or another mental health service. We have informed the local authority education service.

Students will wish to talk with those around them at home. Please refer to the attached information for help and guidance on how to talk about suicide with young people. We will be in touch if we have any concerns about the wellbeing of your child.

Please feel welcome to contact the following staff for information about the school's response, or if you have any concerns about your child or young person.

(Insert contact details)

Yours sincerely  
Headteacher

### III. Helpful tips for parents supporting students after a possible suicide

**Suicide is a difficult topic to talk about. Here are some thoughts to bear in mind when supporting your children.**

Young people can have many different and sometimes contradictory feelings about a death by suicide, including shock, confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt and sadness.

Try and support them as best you can. You don't have to be a therapist to do this. Just listening to their thoughts and acknowledging their feelings is a great help.

Try phrases like this:

"It sounds like you have so many thoughts and feelings about how (name of the person) died. That's normal in this situation. It's natural to feel sad and then feel okay a bit later."

#### There is no right way to grieve

##### Be guided by your child

It might be hard to be around your child right now. If you need some support to manage this, let the school know. Also see the numbers of helplines below.

##### Has your family recently had any big changes or upsets?

If your child has recently had another stressful experience or trauma, this might make this time even harder for them. If your child is already getting support from CAMHS or another youth mental health service, please let them know.

##### Sometimes people don't react to this sort of news immediately

And that's fine. However, if you are worried about your child's behaviour or see any changes that seem worrying, check in with the school and ask about getting your child support from them or through your GP.

##### Use social media sensitively

We're asking students to think before they post. If families can do this together and be really thoughtful at this time, that would be appreciated by all.

##### Useful contacts:

- **Grief Encounter** [www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk) | Helpline: 0808 802 0111 | [bereavementsupport@griefencounter.org.uk](mailto:bereavementsupport@griefencounter.org.uk)
- **Papyrus** [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org) | Helpline: 0800 068 41 41 | Text: 88247 | [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org)
- **SHOUT** [www.giveusashout.org](http://www.giveusashout.org) | Text: 85258

## IV. Talking about suicide with young people - a guide for teachers and school staff

**Suicide or sudden death is a difficult topic for most people to talk about. Here are some thoughts to bear in mind if young people want to talk to you about the death that has occurred.**

Questions or issues that may come up

Helpful things to say

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### **Why?**

We may not understand or know why the person died in this way, even if we are aware of circumstances that have been difficult for the person who died. Coming to terms with the news is difficult for everyone, no matter how close or distant they may have been to the person.

### **Emotions**

We can have many different and sometimes contradictory feelings about a death by suicide, including shock, confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt and sadness. It is important to accept whatever feelings arise.

When we hear of a suicide or sudden death, we need safe ways of expressing our feelings, space to talk and acceptance of whatever feeling is there.

### **How?**

It is important not to focus on the method of death but think instead of how the death affects us and how we can manage the feelings that arise.

### **Blame**

Blaming or scapegoating is not fair or helpful. It is understandable that we look for answers or reasons why a possible suicide has happened. It is important to remember that any death by suicide is complicated and blame can hurt others a great deal.

The cause of [NAME]'s death may be suicide. Suicide is complicated; and always hard for us to understand. It is natural for us to search for reasons, but this is something that's hard to know about.

There can be lots of feelings around, after hearing news of a possible suicide, or there could be no feelings right now. We all respond in different ways. There really isn't a right or wrong or normal way to respond. It's important to notice and accept however you're feeling and not make judgements about your feelings and reactions, or anyone else's.

I know that this situation feels confusing and difficult.

Let's talk about how you feel.  
What helps you when you have strong or difficult feelings?  
What can we think of that will help you cope with this news?

Blaming isn't fair and it can hurt people a great deal.

We might want to use blame to answer the question why this happened and that's understandable, but it's not fair on anyone.

## V. Media communications

A death by suicide or sudden tragic death of a school-age student can attract a lot of media attention. It is important for a school to develop appropriate messaging and to strongly encourage the media to adhere to the recommendations for safe reporting developed by leading suicide prevention organisations. These recommendations are as follows:

- Do not glamourise the victim or the suicide
- Do not describe the details of the suicide
- Use preferred language, such as ‘may have died by suicide’ rather than ‘committed suicide’ or ‘successful suicide’
- Include contacts for local and national mental health resources

### Key messages for media spokesperson

This information is for use by the person designated by the school to speak to the media.

#### School’s messages

- We are deeply saddened over the sudden death of one of our students. Our thoughts and prayers go out to [his/her/their] family and friends and the entire community
- We will be offering support for students and staff
- We have communicated with parents and will be hosting an evening for parents and the community to offer support and information

### Information on suicide

- Every life lost is a tragedy. Raising awareness of suicide and the fact that suicide can be preventable, can help reduce the risk
- The variables around each suicide are complex
- Bereavement by suicide has a devastating impact for family members and friends, as well as the wider community
- Public Health England has produced a useful guide to supporting people bereaved by suicide, ‘Help is at Hand: A Resource for People Bereaved by Suicide or Traumatic Death’ (Public Health England)

**Available online:** [www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk](http://www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk)

**Hard copy order from:** [www.healthpublications.gov.uk](http://www.healthpublications.gov.uk) – search for Help is at Hand 2021 version.

## **Sample press release to be provided to local media outlets either upon request or proactively.**

School staff were informed that a [AGE] -year-old student at [SCHOOL NAME] has died. The cause of death may have been due to suicide [RELEASING THIS INFORMATION MUST BE DONE WITH PARENTAL CONSENT AND THE SCHOOL MAY HAVE TO SAY SUDDEN DEATH RATHER THAN MENTION SUICIDE]. Our thoughts and support go out to [HIS/HER/THEIR] family and friends at this difficult time.

The school is working with (insert which agencies are supporting the school) to provide support to students and staff. This includes providing information about common reactions following a suicide, how adults can help young people cope, and what to do if they have any concerns about their own children's behaviour.

A communication has been sent to all parents, who can contact the school for further support. Our aim is to return to normal routines as quickly as possible, while recognising that some students will continue to be affected for some time.

If you are supporting someone experiencing suicidal thoughts, you can also use the helplines below. Trained suicide prevention workers will talk you through practical advice and tips.

Under 18s can call **Childline** on 0800 1111 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

For young people under 35, please call **Papyrus**, a charity which runs HOPELINE247.

**Call** 0800 068 41 41

**Text** 88247

**Email** pat@papyrus-uk.org

**Opening Hours:** 24 hours a day, every day of the year including weekends and bank holidays

**SHOUT** www.giveusashout.org

Text **Jami** to 85258 – open 24/7

Call your GP and ask for an emergency appointment

Contact your mental health team if you have one

If anyone is in immediate danger, call 999

## VI. Future proofing conversations and plans

This is an opportunity to think through with SLT and the CIT what contingency plans need to be in place in school life should a critical incident like a death, which may be due to suicide, occur.

These events disrupt the flow of school life and so future proofing is an important aspect of future management.

Here are some questions to begin this process with the SLT and CIT.

- Which rooms in school can be requisitioned to become the support rooms used by students and, at appropriate times, by staff?
- How would the school cope if a suicide took place during a public examination period? And the death affected the year group sitting the exams?
- What would happen if the suicide took place in the school holidays? Could the school open the building to be able to set up a support centre? Are there other premises that can also be used for this purpose?
- Where would a book of condolences be placed in the school for students to record their feelings at this difficult time? Or could this be an online resource that can be monitored by staff before posts go 'live'?
- Which staff members have the skills to be particularly proactive in terms of checking-in with vulnerable students?
- Which agencies/individuals will we need to inform? See page 7 for suggestions

**CIT Members**

Name of CIT members and their responsibilities  
in an emergency

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

School role \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

CIT role \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

School role \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

CIT role \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

School role \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

CIT role \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## VIII. National helplines and resources

### Helplines for bereavement support

Grief Encounter provides support to bereaved children, young people and their families who have experienced the death of a parent, sibling or loved one.

0808 802 0111 – weekdays 9.30am-3pm  
bereavementsupport@griefencounter.org.uk  
www.griefencounter.org.uk

### The Compassionate Friends

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is a charitable organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents, dedicated to the support and care of other similarly bereaved family members who have suffered the death of a child or children of any age and from any cause.

0345 123 2304 – every day 10am-4pm and 7-10pm  
helpline@tcf.org.uk  
www.tcf.org.uk

### Winston's Wish

Freephone National Helpline for therapeutic advice on supporting a grieving child or young person after the death of a loved one.

0808 802 0021 – weekdays 8am-8pm  
www.winstonswish.org.uk

### Helplines for Young people in crisis

#### Childline

Helpline and online chat for young people.  
0800 1111 – open 24/7

#### Papyrus HOPELINE247

Confidential support and advice service for children and young people under the age of 35 who are experiencing thoughts of suicide or for anyone concerned that a young person could be thinking about suicide.

Call 0800 068 41 41 – open 24/7  
Text 88247  
pat@papyrus-uk.org

### SHOUT

Shout is the UK's first 24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis, anytime, anywhere. It's a place to go if you're struggling to cope and you need immediate help.

Text 85258 – open 24/7  
www.giveusashout.org

### Kooth

Kooth is a digital resource for young people, providing text-based counselling services and discussion boards.

These services are commissioned at a local level and Kooth have excellent coverage.

www.kooth.com

### Body & Soul

Body & Soul is a UK-based charity that uses a community-based and trauma informed approach (DBT) to support 16–30 year-olds who have attempted suicide within the last 12 months.

enquiries@bodyandsoulcharity.org  
www.bodyandsoulcharity.org



# Notes

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Emergency Response Initiative Consortium

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