

Resources & Handouts for Students, Parents & Staff, in the event of a Critical Incident at Scariff Community College

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These resources are taken from Section 11 of *Responding to Critical Incidents-NEPS Guidelines and Resource materials for Schools* (DES, 2015).

Additional resources are taken from *Developing a Support team and Critical Incident Management-Guidance for Schools and Centres for Education* (LCETB, 2019-2020).

R3: Children's' Understanding and Reaction to Death According to Age (For Parents & Staff)

Children's understanding and reaction to death will depend on their age and their developmental stage. The following are guides only as children will differ in their reactions and grasp of events for a range of reasons other than age alone.

AGES 0 – 2 YEARS

Infants do not understand the meaning of death
They may display anxiety when separated from a loved one
They may appear upset, subdued and uninterested in their surroundings.

AGES 2 – 5 YEARS

No understanding of the permanency of death
May search for the missing person from a loved one
May feel responsible for the death in some way
May become apathetic and depressed
May regress to an earlier stage of development e.g. thumb sucking, bedwetting, tantrums or may become clingy
May develop fears of going to sleep
May worry that other loved ones may die.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Continuity of normal routine e.g. mealtimes and bedtime
- Offer physical comfort
- Explain the death in clear, simple language, using words like “dead” and “died” - Do not use terms like “gone to sleep” or “passed away”
- You may need to repeat the same information again and again
- Permit them to ask questions and be consistent in your answers • Reassure them that they had nothing to do with the death and of the wellbeing of other family members.

AGES 5 – 9 YEARS

Beginning to realise the permanency of death, but their idea of life after death is still vague
May have concerns about how the deceased is feeling or what he/she is thinking in the grave
May have a lot of questions about aspects of the death e.g. how the person died, what they looked like, the funeral, heaven, coffins
The reaction of their peers is important, they may feel ‘different’ to them

Their peers may be awkward about the death and avoid contact
They may become the target of bullying.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Encourage the child to talk and cry about the deceased if they wish to, otherwise respect their silence
- Answer questions and provide as much factual information about the death as possible
- Reassure them that thinking and feeling ceases after death
- Be vigilant in relation to bullying.

AGES 9 – 12 YEARS

Understand the finality and universality of death Fully understand the finality, universality and inevitability of death. Their experience of death is similar to adults
May display anger.

Awareness of their own mortality and may worry about their own death
May display psychosomatic symptoms i.e. physical complaints like tummy aches
May wish to stay at home close to parents
May display anger

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Dispel fears about their own health or the health of other loved ones by offering reassurance
- Encourage them to go to school
- Allow them to express their anger, offering appropriate ways to do so.

ADOLESCENTS

Fully understand the finality, universality and inevitability of death. Their experience of death is similar to adults

May have a range of feelings: guilt, regret, anger, loneliness etc.
Death adds to the already confused array of emotions experienced by adolescents
May appear to not care about the death
May seek support outside of the family.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Offer them time to listen
- Allow them to express their grief in their own way
- Be prepared for mood swings
- Don't feel left out if they seem to value their friends more than their parents

- Children's use of social media should be monitored and supported by parents.

If parents are grieving themselves, they may be emotionally unable to support their other children. In this instance, another supportive adult in the child's life, e.g. other family members, friends, neighbours may need to offer emotional support.

It should be remembered that for children with special educational needs, their understanding of what has happened will be in line with their developmental age.

R4: Stages of Grief (For Students, Parents & Staff)

Grief is a normal, healthy and predictable response to loss. Although there are distinct phases in the grieving process, people go through these stages in different sequences and at different paces. Generally the grieving process in adults is thought to take about two years, while with children and adolescents it may be over a more extended time-frame with different issues arising as they go through developmental milestones.

Denial, numbness, shock (up to 6 weeks)

Death of the person may be denied

Emerging feelings may be suppressed

Refusal to talk about the death

Bereaved keeps very busy to avoid thinking about the death

Bereaved may show signs of confusion and forget everyday routines

Children in shock may display either silent withdrawal or outbursts of crying

Acute grief/searching and longing for deceased (6 weeks to 4 months)

Acute sadness – crying

Physical pangs of pain including loss of appetite and disturbed sleep

Emotional pain accompanied by dejection, hopelessness, lack of concentration

Fears of life after death, nightmares, ghosts

Disorganisation

Strong guilt feelings and questioning of self and others, particularly in the case of a sudden death

Feelings of anger at the departed for leaving them

Bereaved may reject offers to comfort them

Adaptation to life without the deceased (6 months to 18 months)

People begin to adjust to their lives without the person who is gone

Sense of isolation

Fearful of forgetting the deceased

Less crying and irritability

Exacerbation of existing personality problems. Children with low self-esteem may be at a greater risk of emotional/behavioural difficulties.

Normalisation of life

Getting on with life

Returned sense of humour and play

Able to participate emotionally in new relationships

Changed relationship with the deceased – able to think of the deceased without pain
Reduction in physical/emotional symptoms
Less guilt

R5: How to Cope when Something Terrible Happens (For Students, Parents & Staff)

Reach out – people do care

Talk to your friends, family and teachers - talking is the most healing medicine

Remember you are normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself as crazy or mad

It is acceptable to cry

It is acceptable to smile

If your feelings and reactions seem different from those of your friends, remember everyone reacts differently

When the stress level is high there is a temptation to try to numb the feelings perhaps with alcohol and drugs, this complicates matters rather than bringing relief

Some people find that writing or drawing is helpful. What about writing a note or letter to the family of the person who died or the person themselves?

Spend time with people who have a positive influence on you

Make as many daily decisions as possible. This will give you a feeling of control over your life, e.g. if someone asks you what you want to eat – answer them, even if you're not sure

Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal – don't try to fight them – they'll decrease over time and become less painful

Make a special effort to take care of yourself during this time. Try to get some extra sleep, eat nutritious foods and get some exercise, even if it is just a walk

Sticking to your "normal" routine helps. Structure your time – keep busy

Take time out – go for a cycle or kick a football

Provide some balance to the negative things that have gone on by doing something special or fun for yourself. Think about something that makes you feel good. Then make it happen – like going to the cinema, listening to music, calling a friend, etc.

Laughter is good medicine. Watch a funny movie or play a silly game with younger children to lighten your spirits

Use of social media can help but do not rely on it as your only source of support

Useful websites: www.spunout.ie; www.youth.ie; www.reachout.com.au

Above all, realise that what you are experiencing is normal following a traumatic event. Be understanding of yourself and others.

R6: Reactions to a Critical Incident (For Students, Parents & Staff)

Following the recent sad event, you may now be experiencing some strong emotional or physical reactions. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to feel but here is a list of difficulties that people sometimes experience following such an event.

FEELINGS

Fear
Anxiety
Guilt
Insecurity
Shame
Shock
Mood Swings
Regret
Anger
Numbness
Tearfulness
Confusion
Loneliness
Isolation

BEHAVIOURAL

Nightmares
Social withdrawal
Over reliance on use of social media
Irritability
Loss of concentration/forgetfulness
Physical/Verbal aggression
Missuse of drugs, including alcohol

PHYSICAL

Tiredness
Sleeplessness
Headaches
Stomach problems - Bowel/Bladder problems
Loss or increase in appetite

THOUGHTS

Disbelief or Denial
Sense of unreality and Preoccupation with images of the event/person

R7: Coping with the Aftermath of a Critical Incident (LCETB) (For Students, Parents & Staff)

Coping with a Critical Incident can be difficult and stressful. It can affect the way we feel, think and behave. The following information will help you understand some of the feelings and reactions you may experience within hours, days or weeks after an event. There are also some suggestions on what may help you during this time.

Normal feelings and thoughts at this time:

Shock

Shock at what has happened. Things may feel unreal. Shock sometimes causes people to deny what has happened. This does not mean you do not care. You may feel like withdrawing, crying or becoming hysterical.

Fear

Fear about the unpredictability of everything especially life, of a similar incident happening again, of breaking down or losing control, of being alone.

Guilt

Feeling responsible in some way for what has happened even though you are being told you could not be, for not being able to make things better or not being able to help others, for being alive or better off than others.

Shame

Shame for not reacting as you thought you should, for needing support from others.

Anger

Anger at someone or something, wanting to blame, wanting to blame for the injustice of the event.

Confusion

Confusion about the event, about how you should react, about having mixed feelings about everything.

Pain

Pain at the loss of the person, of associating this with other incidents, bereavements or losses that you may have experienced before.

Left out by people

People not acknowledging your involvement in the incident or your relationship with the person who is injured or deceased

None of the above

It may be because the person is not known to you.

Physical and behavioural reactions

It is quite normal to experience tiredness, sleeplessness, nightmares, headaches, loss or increase of appetite, bowel/bladder problems, loss of concentration, irritability. Sometimes people feel generally unwell.

Remember:

You need to look after yourself

You are normal and are having normal reactions to an abnormal event

There are people you can talk to

You may not experience any of the above feelings

There is little you can do to avoid these uncomfortable feelings and thoughts but there are things you can do to help you cope.

What you can do to look after yourself:

Talk

Try to talk about what happened and how you feel. Do not bottle things up. Sharing your experience with others who have had similar experiences may help. Let someone know if you are not coping well. If it is difficult to talk, keep a journal of how you are feeling or draw your experiences or emotions.

You need to process the incident and allow it into your mind over time. With time you may need to talk or write about it. You may find that you dream about it over and over again. All this eventually helps you to accept what has happened.

Funeral

Going to the funeral or service may be appropriate.

Physical Health

Try to eat a regular meal three times a day. Make sure you take some exercise and also find ways to relax and rest.

Be careful not to use drink or other drugs to help you cope - they may numb the pain temporarily but can lead to other problems.

Seek help if you still feel any of the following four to six weeks after the event:

You cannot cope with or feel overwhelmed by your feelings

You (continue to) have nightmares

You experience sleeplessness

Intrusive thoughts about the event persist

You begin to have problems in school

You have been using excessive drinking, smoking or other drugs to help you cope since the event.

Where can I get help?

If you are a student, always talk to your parents and/or see your school Counsellor.

If you are a concerned parent, visit your G.P. with your son/daughter and external counselling is available through your G.P.

If you are a staff member, seek support from your GP and the LCETB Employee Assistance Programme.

R8: Grief after Suicide or Suspected Suicide (For Students, Parents & Staff)

Remember there is no right or wrong way to react when someone you know dies. People will have many different reactions to what has happened.

Know that you can survive, even if you feel you can't

You may feel overwhelmed and frightened by your feelings. This is normal. You're not going crazy; you are grieving

You may not feel a strong reaction to what has happened. This is normal

You may experience feelings of guilt, confusion, forgetfulness and anger. Again these feelings are all normal

You may feel angry at the person who has died, at yourself, at God, at everyone and everything. It is ok to express it

You may feel guilty about what you did or did not do. Suicide is the act of an individual, for which we cannot take responsibility

You may never have an answer as to "why" but it is ok to keep asking "why" until you no longer need to ask or you are satisfied with partial answers

Sometimes people make decisions over which we have no control. It was not your choice

Feeling low is temporary, suicide is permanent. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. If you are feeling low or having a difficult time, ask for help

Allow yourself to cry, this will help you to heal

Healing takes time. Allow yourself the time you need to grieve

Every person grieves differently and at a different pace

Delay making any big decisions, if possible

This is the hardest thing you will ever do. Be patient and compassionate with yourself
Spend time with people who are willing to listen when you need to talk and who also understand your need to be silent

Seek professional help if you feel overwhelmed

If you are thinking of trying to kill yourself, you must talk to a trusted adult

Avoid people who try to tell you what to feel and how to feel it and, in particular, those who think you should "be over it by now"

Ask in school about a support group for survivors that provides a safe place for you to express your feelings, or simply a place to go to be with other survivors who are experiencing some of the same things you're going through

Allow yourself to laugh with others and at yourself. This is healing

Useful websites: www.spunout.ie, www.youth.ie, www.reachout.com.au

R9: Ways to Help your Child through the Difficult Time (For Parents)

Children do not need to be taught how to grieve. They will do it naturally and in healthy ways if we allow them and if we provide a safe atmosphere, permission and example to do so.

Listen carefully. Let them tell their story. Tell them that the reactions they are having are normal

Pay extra attention, spend extra time with them, be more nurturing and comforting
Reassure them that they are safe

Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.

Help them to understand the relationship between anger and trauma. Help them find safe ways to express their feelings e.g. by drawing, taking exercise, or talking

When going out, let them know where you are going and when you will be back

If you are out for a long time, telephone and reassure them

Do not be surprised by changes in behaviour or personality. They will return to their usual selves in time

Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". People are not consoled by such statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to understand and help them. Help them to understand that defiance, aggression and risk behaviour is a way to avoid feeling the pain, hurt and or fear they are feeling
Tolerate regressive behaviour such as nail biting, thumb sucking, or the need for a night light

Share your own experience of being frightened of something and getting through it
If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and that they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died, or had been mean to them, this did not make it happen

Work with the school support services and other available services

As well as advising your child about appropriate use of social media, monitor their use, particularly during this vulnerable time. Useful website: www.webwise.ie

R16: Frequently Asked Questions (Parents)

The following is a summary of questions frequently asked by parents after a critical incident.

Q. This incident has upset my daughter/son. As there are many rumours circulating, I would like to know what really happened. How can I find that information?

A. The school will inform students and parents of the core details of the incident insofar as they are known. It sometimes takes some time for the true facts to emerge. In the meantime, it is important to stick to the facts as known. Discourage rumour or gossip as it is often incorrect and can be distressing for the families and friends of those involved. Information on social media is not reliable and always needs to be checked.

Q. Will help be available to the students in the school?

A. This will depend on the particular situation. The school will usually put a plan in place for supporting students. This support may include classroom discussion, small group discussion or individual support for students who need it. If there is particular concern about your son or daughter, you will be informed.

Q. How can I help my child?

A. You are the natural support for your child. He/she may want to discuss their feelings and thoughts with you. You can help by listening carefully. You should tell them it is ok to feel the way they do, that people react in many different ways and that they should talk rather than bottle things up. Advise on and monitor safe use of social media.

Q. How long will the grief last?

A. There is no quick answer to this. It varies from individual to individual and according to circumstances. It will also be affected by the closeness of the child to the event or to person who died. Memories of other bereavements may also be brought up by the incident. Be patient and understanding. It can take time.

Q. Since the incident occurred my child has difficulty in sleeping, complains of headaches etc. Can I be sure these are related to the incident?

A. Grief can affect one physically as well as emotionally and these and other symptoms may be part of a grief reaction. If they persist, consult a doctor for a check-up.

Q. If my child remains very upset what should I do?

A. If your child remains distressed after a period of six weeks or so, he/she may need additional support, but there is no fixed rule about the length of the grieving process. If you are very concerned at any point, it is best to seek more help through your GP/HSE Services.

Q. In what ways are adolescents different from other children?

A. During adolescence there are a lot of changes going on for young people and some may feel confused about themselves and the world around them. Grief tends to heighten these feelings and increase the confusion. At this time, too, the individual may look more to friends than to family for support and comfort. Don't feel rejected by this. Just be available to listen when they need to talk and make sure they know you are there for them when they need you.

R20: Handout: Useful Helplines & Websites (For Students, Parents & Staff)

HELPLINES

If you need someone to talk to, at any time of the day or night:

Childline: 1800 666 666 (free calls)

Pieta House: Freephone 1800 247247 (24 hrs) or Text Help to 51444. www.pieta.ie

Samaritans: Phone-116 123 (24 hours a day)

Text Hello to 50808 (Free 24 hr crisis helpline)

WEBSITES

SpunOut-An Irish online youth information centre, a magazine, a health clinic, a contact directory, a youth media forum a take action initiative, a community building place: www.spunout.ie

A site that focuses on issues relating to youth in Ireland today www.youth.ie

An Australian site that helps young people through tough times;

www.reachout.com.au

Barnardos provide resources and advice: www.barnardos.ie/teenhelp

The **Childhood Bereavement Network** (CBN) is a multi-professional federation of organisations and individuals working with bereaved children and young people.

www.irishchildhoodbereavementnetwork.ie

HeadsUp Clare – A one stop shop for finding mental health services for young people in Clare www.headsupclare.ie

Irish Hospice Foundation - www.hospicefoundation.ie

Jigsaw- www.jigsaw.ie Supporting young people's mental health (12-25 years).

Limerick: 061-974510

Lifelines supports all people who are affected in anyway by self-injury within the United Kingdom and beyond. It supports people who self-injure, and their family and friends www.selfharm.org

Non-judgemental information and support for **LGBTQ+** www.belongto.org , www.goshh.ie, www.teni.ie & www.gayswitchboard.ie

Mental Health Ireland aims to promote positive mental health and to actively support persons with a mental illness, their families and carers.

www.mentalhelathireland.ie

Papyrus provides resources and support for those dealing with suicide, depression or emotional distress, particularly teenagers and young adults www.papyrus-uk.org

Pieta House provide suicide and self-harm interventions as well as having suicide bereavement centres nationwide www.pieta.ie

Rainbows provide peer support groups for children, following a bereavement, separation or divorce www.rainbowsireland.ie

Winstonswish Foundation, help for grieving children and their families
www.winstonswish.org.uk