

## **Coronavirus Related Critical Incident Guidance for Early Years Settings (nurseries, pre-schools and childminders)**

### **Critical Incident Support Service (CISS)**

The coronavirus pandemic is impacting upon our settings, families, communities and our way of life. The current situation means that there is an increased risk of critical incidents both within a setting and its wider community. The coronavirus outbreak is also giving rise to higher levels of anxiety due to the uncertainty around the coronavirus, social distancing measures and early years settings only being open to a small number of children.

#### **What is a Critical Incident?**

A critical incident is defined as a sudden death, unexpected and traumatic incident or sequence of events that cause serious distress and disruption to the setting's community. This is useful to distinguish this from a bereavement or loss which would generally have a less significant impact on the setting's community.

#### **Child Death**

In the event of the death of a child, every setting is different and the death of a child is a challenging event which will inevitably put a setting under considerable pressure. Please use the accompanying checklist which sets out a number of actions which settings are advised to consider in the event of the death of a child. The precise details of the actions will vary according to the specific circumstances.

#### **Bereavement (following the death of a family member or member of staff)**

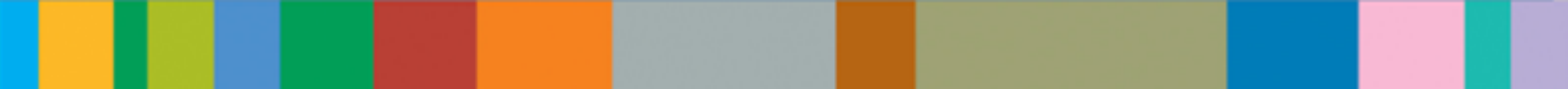
This guidance is accompanied by a checklist for early years settings to use when supporting a family with the death of a family member or a member or staff. Please also refer to this document.

Help and support for children who experience bereavement is best provided by a trusted, familiar adult as and when it is needed. In time, most children and adults will come to terms with what has happened and recover. Children will grieve in different ways and their responses to bereavement will depend on their age, understanding and relationship with the person who has died. Their understanding and how they grieve will be different to adults. Even very young children will still need information about what has happened and to be told the truth. It is important that the language used is simple, considering the age of the child and how much they understand.

#### **Under 6 months**

At this age babies will have no understanding of death, but will notice if their main caregiver (e.g. Mum or Dad) is absent.

Some common reactions include: feeding difficulties, sleeping problems, crying and being worried.



6 months to 2 years

Children still won't have any understanding of death, but they will be very upset if their main caregiver is absent. At around 2 years old, children start to notice the absence of other people e.g. a familiar grandparent.

Some common reactions include: loud crying and being inconsolable, anger and upset when there are changes to their routine, sleeping difficulties, tummy aches, looking for the person and asking where they are.

2 – 5 years

Children at this age will talk about death but don't understand it. A child of 3 or 4 may use the word 'dead' in context and will begin to differentiate between things which are dead and alive. They are unlikely to understand abstract concepts like 'forever' and won't yet grasp that death is permanent and irreversible. They may believe in magical thinking and may think they are directly responsible for the death.

Some common reactions include: asking the same questions repeatedly, needing reassurance that you're not going to die to and death is not their fault, clingy behaviour and other behaviours.

## **Preparation**

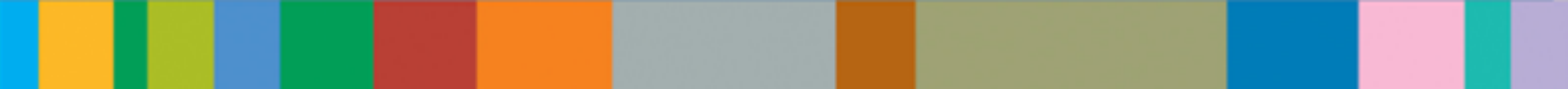
During the coronavirus outbreak we would advise settings to plan ahead and prepare for such an event by following the points below and referring to the checklist. In the event of the death of a family member, it is advised that the setting should follow the guidance and checklist provided.

In the event of the death of a child or a member of staff, the early years setting should follow their plan of action (based on the guidance and checklist) in the first instance. If further support is needed, they can contact the CISS on 01204 338060 and speak to a member of the CISS team.

### **As part of your preparation it is advised to consider the following:**

(for each issue identify more than one member of staff in the event of staff absence / illness)

- Which member(s) of staff will liaise with the family / families affected?
- How will you communicate information to staff: phone, e-mail or other messaging systems? Who will lead on this?
- How will you communicate information to the wider community – parents / carers and children?
- What support systems will be in place for the setting's community with a focus on prompting connectedness whilst physically apart?
- Identify vulnerable staff and pupils.
- What information needs to be shared with staff? This may include information about typical responses to bereavement and how to manage this while recognising that this is a new situation for all of us. Please refer to the document 'Taking care of yourself after hearing sad news' and consider the websites and resources below.

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- Provide staff with information that can be shared with parents about children's responses to bereavement if the need arises. Please refer to the following:
    - Advice for parents / carers: when talking to children about someone who has died (handout)
    - Activities for children (handout)
    - Websites and resources
  - Refer to the Coronavirus Checklist for Early Years Settings.

The role of the CISS is to offer critical incident support to management teams in settings. The support from CISS is founded on helping early years settings manage the immediate aftermath of the incident and we can support settings by offering advice and support around communication, practical arrangements and managing emotions. Please follow the checklist in the first instance. If further support from the CISS is required, the CISS will speak to a member of the management team and will establish what steps have already been taken so far and identify what needs to happen next. This contact will be made by telephone or video call. The member of CISS working with the setting will offer to follow up with you over the next few days to offer further support with any issues that may arise.

## Websites and resources

The following websites have produced guidance for supporting children during coronavirus.

<https://www.childbereavementuk.org> (Tel: 0800 02 888 40)

This website provides information on supporting bereaved children in Early Years settings and provides a list of suggested books for Early Years.

<https://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk> (Tel: 020 7843 6309)

This is a comprehensive website with COVID specific resources, with links to relevant websites and resources. This has a link to Child Bereavement UK which includes a helpful short video for parents.

[www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) (Tel: 0808 802 0021)

There are COVID specific resources available on this website.

The following document is relevant:

[How to tell a child or young person that someone has died from coronavirus](#)

They also publish a book called: Never too Young to Grieve: Supporting Children Under 5's after the death of a parent.

[www.griefencounter.org.uk](http://www.griefencounter.org.uk) (Tel: 0808 802 0111)

Provides support for bereaved children and has many useful resources on the website.

<https://www.cruse.org.uk> (Tel: 0808 8081677)

Cruse Bereavement Care have produced some [tips about talking to children](#) among their wider resources about [grief and coronavirus](#)

### Adult support

[www.1pointbolton.org.uk/](http://www.1pointbolton.org.uk/) (Tel: 01204 917745)

Silverwellbeing Bereavement Service for people aged 16 years and over who have experienced a bereavement or loss in the past 12 months. This is part of 1point and based in Bolton.

### Saying goodbye – the following link may be useful:

- [How to say goodbye when a funeral isn't possible](#), from Winston's Wish

## **Advice for parents / carers: when talking to children about someone who has died (under 5's)**

- Tell children as soon as possible so they don't find out from someone else.
- Even very young children will still need information about what has happened and to be told the truth. Keep the language simple and consider their age and how much they understand.
- Consider the language to use with children e.g. use 'dead', 'passed away' – it could be linked with a pet that has died. Avoid using 'gone to sleep', 'gone away', 'not with us' and 'lost them'. A child of 3 or 4 may use the word dead in context and begin to differentiate between things that are dead and alive but are unlikely to understand abstract concepts and this may make them afraid of going to sleep or losing something.
- They are unlikely to understand abstract concepts like 'forever' and won't yet grasp that death is permanent and irreversible.
- Give the information a bit at a time allowing them time to digest it. Don't assume they understand what has been said right away.
- A storybook on death or exploring the life cycle with examples from the natural world may help children to grasp the meaning of what dead means. The following website contains suggested books that could be used <https://www.childbereavementuk.org>
- If your child asks questions, answer their questions honestly. It's ok to let them know if you don't know the answer to their question.
- They may ask the same questions several times and you may need to tell the story over and over again. This will help your child to understand what has happened.
- Children may become worried that other members of the family may become ill. Explain that the illness is often mild and most people recover but be honest and say that some people do die and don't make promises (e.g. 'Grandma will be fine'). Offer comfort to them by telling them they are loved and supported.
- Encourage and help your child to express their emotions by giving them opportunities through talking, play, drawing or other activities. They may play being dead and adults may find this difficult, this can help very young children make sense of the world.
- Older children may want to talk about it and ask the same questions. They may ask the same questions, looking for a more detailed explanation each time. This may continue over time as they get older and their understanding of the world develops. Let them know there is no 'right' or 'wrong' time to talk about it. Children may talk about it at bedtime because it's a quiet part of the day and they may need more reassurance at this time.
- Don't be afraid to show children how you are feeling. If they see an adult expressing their emotions, they know it's ok for them to do the same. However if your feelings are particularly strong and intense during certain times, try not to let your child see them as this may cause them to worry.
- Tell children that it is normal to experience different emotions. Children respond differently to adults. They may seem to be upset and then suddenly be happy. Tell them it is ok to laugh or cry.

- Children may demonstrate their feelings through anger or withdrawal. They will return to their usual behaviour in time. If they become angry and direct this at you, they don't mean it personally, they are just upset.
- Give your child extra attention by spending more time with them, offering more nurturing and comforting time.
- At this current time, usual structure has changed with children attending settings but try to keep a regular routine as much as you can with regular mealtimes, homework, playtime and bedtime.
- Reassure them it's not their fault. If they are feeling guilt or shame, emphasise that they did not choose for this to happen and they are not to blame. Even if they were angry with the person who died or had been mean to them, this is not the cause of what has happened.
- Remember that this will affect you as a parent / carer emotionally and you can only do what you can. No one is super-human and you also need to look after yourself.

#### **Activities for children / ways to say goodbye**

- Drawing themselves with the person if they knew them.
- Listening to music that reminds them of the person or listening to music that makes them feel happy.
- Having a photograph of the person.
- Having something they gave you may help.
- Making a memorial (e.g. a plant or having a memory box with special items / photos / written memories inside).