

Postvention support package for Education Establishments

A guidance document for educational establishments in Birmingham in the event of a suspected suicide in a school community.

Content warning: this document discusses self-harm and suicide.

Easy access policy summary

The following policy is related to suspected suicides which the school has been notified of after they have taken place. If the event has taken place on school premises, or if an attempt is ongoing, you should immediately call emergency services and administer first aid before taking any further action.

Initiating the critical incident response (3.1)	• School to FIRST notify the education safeguarding team of death by Notification of Child Death (NCD) form (educationsafeguarding@birmingham.gov.uk) – see appendix B • Education safeguarding team notifies those who need to know via email (Senior Officer for Suicide Prevention (suicideprevention@birmingham.gov.uk), Educational Psychology (educationalpsychology@birmingham.gov.uk), Director of Education and Director of Thriving Families. • School can contact Samaritans Step by Step, a specialist education postvention service (stepbystep@samaritans.org or 0808 168 2528) • Ensure all members of postvention team are notified (see section 2.3) • Refrain from contacting further services/support (excluding emergency services) at this point and avoid sharing any personally identifiable information with others
Communicating the news (3.2)	• Supporting the family • Sharing the news with the school community • Managing social media • Managing the press
Identifying vulnerable individuals (3.3)	• Identify vulnerable individuals using the Circles of Vulnerability Matrix • Educate staff, pupils and parents on indicators of high risk to look out for • Ensure those identified as high risk receive support
Providing immediate support (3.4)	• Protected spaces for people to use • Highlight a member of staff to access for support • Maintaining routine • Facilitating peer-support

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1. Introduction

1.1 The importance of postvention in education settings

This support package has been created to provide guidance for educational establishments in Birmingham in the event of a suspected death by suicide in a school community. The effects of a suicide can be devastating, and the impact felt by many – including family, friends, neighbours, employers, colleagues, professionals, and the wider community. Educational establishments may need support to feel prepared on how to respond to a critical incident such as a death by suicide.

Young people are highly susceptible to further harm after being in proximity to a death by suicide. The suicide of a schoolmate increases the risk of suicidal thoughts or attempts among young people aged 12-17 years (especially those aged 12-13 years) for up to two years following the suicide.

Postvention is defined as the actions taken to support the community following a death by suicide (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide, 2017). Effective postvention plans are important to help those affected to grieve and recover and could support the prevention of further suicides. Postvention is also known as the support and care of those bereaved or affected by suicide.

Whilst this package references numerous secondary services and organisations which schools can use, the most important asset a school has in recovering from a death by suicide is its community. Your role as staff will be vital in supporting each other and your students: you are the people who know each other best, can identify risk and can use your relationships to support each other.

This package offers guidance to support in decision-making during this difficult time. Suicide can be complex; this tailored package includes steps that can be followed in the event of a suspected death by suicide in a school community. The package also provides support to educational establishments in the short and longer term. This package includes a range of guidance and resources, be mindful to consider the context and need for your educational establishment, as some areas may not be necessary. Please note that responding to suicide attempts may require alternative support that may not be covered in this package – all attempts to end one's life should be taken seriously. Please see the Training section for courses that may be useful for suicide prevention.

1.2 Definitions and acronyms

Key word	Definition
Mental Health	A state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. (World Health Organisation)
NCD	Notification of Child Death
Postvention	The actions taken to support the community following a death by suicide. Effective postvention support can help people to grieve and recover and can be a critical element of preventing suicides from happening in the future. (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide)
Resumption	The action of beginning something again after a pause or period of time. (Cambridge Dictionary)
School Community	All educational establishments in Birmingham, including students, parents/carers, staff members and other members closely linked to this cohort.
Self-Harm	When a person intentionally hurts themselves as a way of dealing with very difficult feelings, painful memories or overwhelming situations and experiences". (Mind)
Suicide	The deliberate act to intentionally end one's life. (Mind)
Suspected Death by Suicide	Term used to describe the unexplained death of a person before it has been concluded by a coroner as suicide. The coroner's inquest process approximately ranges between 3-18 months to close a suicide case.

2. Preparatory actions

2.1 School Policies

Ensure that existing school policies (e.g. safeguarding, bereavement and emergency response policies) signpost to this document.

2.2 Training

One preparatory action every school can take is ensuring its staff are trained to spot the signs of someone in crisis. There are resources listed at the end of this document about where to access appropriate training.

2.3 Putting together a postvention team

It is essential to put together a postvention team so you are prepared if an incident does occur. The benefit of this is to ensure that communication is not being duplicated during an already distressing and confusing time.

Jobs you might need to allocate might include:

- **Team lead:** this person will chair meetings, keep track of progress and be the point of contact with professional bodies such as the police, coroner and local authority
- **Family liaison:** to minimise adding additional stress, choose one member of staff to be a point of contact with the bereaved family. It may help for this to be a staff member the family have a good relationship with if this is possible
- **Press liaison:** this person will be responsible for managing any contact with local press. This person can contact Samaritan's media advice team at mediaadvice@samaritans.org for advice and support
- **Social media monitor:** this person will be responsible for responding to any difficulties with social media content following the death
- **Staff wellbeing lead:** a named person who staff can seek support from. Ideally with some degree of MHFA or Suicide Prevention training
- **Pupil wellbeing lead:** a named person who pupils can seek support from. Ideally someone in a pastoral role with some degree of MHFA or Suicide Prevention training
- **Safeguarding lead:** the person responsible for making any safeguarding referrals

3. The policy

3.1 Initiating the critical incident response

If the incident takes place on school property or there is an immediate danger to life, call the ambulance and police before all else.

- School FIRST to notify the education safeguarding team of news of death by Notification of Child Death form (educationsafeguarding@birmingham.gov.uk) to confirm facts before taking any further action – see appendix B for process overview
- Education safeguarding team notifies those who need to know via email, e.g. Public Health Suicide Prevention (suicideprevention@birmingham.gov.uk), Educational Psychology (educationalpsychology@birmingham.gov.uk), Director of Education and Director of Thriving Families
- School can contact Samaritans Step by Step, a specialist Education Postvention service (stepbystep@samaritans.org or 0808 168 2528)
- Ensure all members of postvention team are notified but confirm information before sharing outside of this team
- Refrain from contacting further services/support (excluding emergency services) at this point and avoid sharing any personally identifiable information with others

3.2 Communicating the news

Whilst external services can support you to share the news in the right way, as the people with existing relationships with your school community, it is you as school leadership who is responsible for sharing the news with your school community.

In any and all communications around the death, please ensure that the information given:

- Refers to the death as a ‘sudden death’ until the Coroner reaches a verdict – state that the nature and cause of death are still being determined and that additional information will be forthcoming
- Is factually correct but does not include detail of the suicidal act itself
- Does not romanticise, glorify, or vilify the death
- Does not include details of any suicide note
- Does not include speculation over the motive for suicide
- Does not use euphemisms
- Does not go against the wishes expressed by the family
- Signposts to where to get help if someone is affected by the news
- Reinforces that the death is permanent
- Reinforces that there will be a wide range of reactions and that this is normal

- Reinforces an understanding that fleeting thoughts of suicide are not abnormal and that with support people can cope with them
- Presents seeking help and talking as important and positive

3.2.1 Communicating with the family of the deceased

Important steps:

- **Contact the police or family as soon as possible** to confirm the death and whether it is being treated as suicide
- **Allocate a single point of contact** to liaise with the family affected by the incident (and ensure supervision is available to this person)
- Discuss **what information the family feel comfortable being shared** (particularly around the cause of death) with should be shared with staff and students*
- **Offer the family condolences** from the educational establishment, offer ongoing support and ask what, if anything, can be done to assist. If appropriate, ask the family to identify any friends of the deceased who may require support.
- Ensure that the family do not receive general administrative communications for the deceased individual, for example, information on school trips or lunches.
- **Be sensitive to cultural norms** when deciding when conversations about funerals should take place.
- **Make the family aware of support available to them** by sharing 'Help is at Hand' and signposting to bereavement support

*What to do if the family does not want the nature or cause of death to be disclosed:

While the fact that someone has died may be disclosed immediately, **information about the nature and cause of death should not be disclosed until the family has been consulted.** If the death has been declared a suicide but the family does not want this disclosed, someone from the school who has a good relationship with the family should contact them. They should explain that students are already talking about the death 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, schools can simply state that the family has requested that information is not shared. Schools can still take the opportunity to acknowledge rumours about suicide and to address the topic of suicide in a responsible way to assist other young people who may be depressed or suicidal. Step by Step can support schools with these communications.

3.2.2 Communicating with staff

Important steps:

- given to staff first (ideally in person) and to give them time to process this news before addressing students.
- Consider contacting staff who are not on site.
- Ensure that staff are aware of the emotional support available to them and others (please see the Service Directory).
- It may also be helpful to hold an initial staff meeting before students are informed.

All staff need to know:

- in brief what has happened (include pertinent facts without going into details)
- what support the school is putting in place
- what actions the school will take with regards to memorials and funerals
- where to find further information about suicide and grief
- the importance of talking and seeking support
- the importance in supporting and looking out for each other
- where to access support for themselves
- what to do if they are worried about someone else

3.2.3 Communicating with students

It may also be helpful to acknowledge that there may be rumours circulating which are often inaccurate and remind students that these can be deeply hurtful, distressing and unfair to the deceased person, their family and friends.

Important steps:

- **Break the news to students in small groups or classes**, where possible. **Do not notify students in a large assembly**
- **Prepare a statement** which all staff can use when talking to young people and families to ensure consistency
- Be reassuring and calm when delivering the news as much as possible
- Provide **reassurance about emotions** and responses to the news and allow expressions of difficult feelings and grief
- **Encourage support and care for each other**
- Ensure information is **age appropriate**

Students should know

- That the person has died – whether the cause of death is disclosed will be based on age of the young people's peers and the wishes of the family. If you don't have clarification on the cause of death or family consent, use open statements such as "[this person] has died suddenly which we weren't expecting. We just don't know why at the moment"
- what support the school is putting in place
- that information about remembrance will be shared once received from the family
- where to find further information about grief
- what support is available and how to access it
- the importance of talking and seeking support
- the importance in supporting and looking out for each other
- what to do if they are worried about someone else

3.2.4 Communicating with parents in the wider school community

Important steps:

- To notify all pupils' parents and carers, a **death notification statement** is recommended to be sent by the most effective and efficient means by the educational establishment, this may be via email or letter
- Ensure the school leadership and administration teams are **prepared for continuous enquiries from parents** once the death is known.

Parents need to know:

- in brief what has happened (include pertinent facts without going into details)
- assurance that support will be made available for pupils (and any details of what this support might be)
- where to find further information about suicide and grief
- the importance of talking and seeking support
- the importance in supporting and looking out for each other
- where to access support for themselves
- what to do if they are worried about someone else
- that respecting the family's privacy is encouraged
- assurance that when appropriate and in agreement with the family, information about remembrance will be shared

It may also be helpful to acknowledge that there may be rumours circulating which are often inaccurate and remind parents that these can be deeply hurtful, distressing and unfair to the deceased person, their family and friends.

3.2.5 Managing social media

The following suggestions may be helpful during a difficult time when it comes to managing social media:

- **Avoid communicating about the death** via social media
- **Avoid confirming or denying information** shared on social media
- **Ask parents/carers/students to notify the school** if there are any concerning social media posts/comments about the death so these can be monitored and addressed where appropriate
- If information about the death is made available on social media platforms before the educational establishment has informed the staff and students, it is suggested to **continue with your plans**
- **Identify social media accounts that may need monitoring**/attention
- Social media platforms can be used **to promote the local services** available and mental health and suicide prevention awareness to the wider school community

Samaritans has also developed guidance on staying safe online, co-designed by young people with lived experience of self-harm and suicidal feelings, and experience of supporting others at risk. You can access that [here](#).

There is guidance available on how to talk about suicide safely online [here](#).

There is a tool designed to present a visual prompt when a person searches for harmful keywords or phrases relating to the topic of self-harm or suicide. It discreetly intercepts harmful searches and provides signposting to 24/7 free mental health support. This service is available free to educational establishments (ripplesuicideprevention.com).

3.2.6 Managing the press

Key points:

- appoint a **single media spokesperson** on the school's behalf
- **discourage students and other staff members from making public comments**, including on social media
- the media spokesperson should **prepare a statement for the media** and not deviate from it
- the statement should **avoid giving details of the suicide method** or any suicide note, or 'explaining' why the suicide might have happened
- until a Coroner has declared that the death was a suicide, the **death should be referred to as an unexpected death**
- where referring to suicide is appropriate, be sure to use appropriate language:

Do use phrases like	Avoid phrases like
A suicide	A successful suicide attempt
Die by suicide End their own life	Commit suicide
A suicide attempt	An unsuccessful/failed suicide attempt A cry for help
Person at risk of suicide	Suicide-prone person

Samaritans have developed guidance for reporting on youth suicides, as it is important for journalists to be aware that young people are a particularly vulnerable audience in relation to media coverage of suicide and self-harm ([Guidance on reporting on youth suicides](#)).

If helpful, the School and Governor support service can also provide advice on managing the media (school.support@birmingham.gov.uk).

3.3 Managing risk

Working with partners, educational establishments can identify vulnerable staff and students following a suspected death by suicide in a school community. Using the Circles of Vulnerability Matrix can be helpful, please refer to the relevant resource sheet at Appendix A of this document. **If you identify anyone who may be vulnerable, you should make sure that appropriate support is facilitated for them.**

It can be helpful to know that the following areas may increase risk for staff and students:

- History of suicide attempts or self-harm
- Stressful life events, divorce, or bereavement
- Eyewitness to the death
- History of mental health disorder(s)
- Communication from the deceased that may have alluded to the death
- Negative interaction with the deceased
- Close friend and/or family member of the deceased
- Sharing similar characteristics/situations as the deceased

It can also be helpful to know the signs of someone who is struggling with their mental health or in crisis. These include, but are not limited to:

Signs someone may be struggling with their mental health	Signs someone may be in crisis
• Withdrawing or isolating themselves (decreased time spent around others, avoiding social situations, stopping doing things they previously found enjoyable) • Mood swings or being unusually erratic, agitated, tearful or emotionless • Self-destructive behaviours (reckless sex or driving, increased use of drugs, alcohol, other substances) • Changes in appetite, weight or sleep patterns • Low self-esteem • Difficulty remembering things or concentrating (forgetting to bring things with them, making mistakes, daydreaming) • Lack of motivation (arriving late, failing to complete tasks)	• Talking about or implying suicide (“I’d be better off dead”...“I just can’t do this anymore”...“I wish I hadn’t been born”) • Looking for a way to end their life (researching ways to end their life, asking unusual questions) • Preparing to end their life (stockpiling medication, buying dangerous items) • Preoccupation with death • No hope for the future (feeling helpless, hopeless, trapped – a belief that things will never get better” • Self-loathing, self-hatred (feeling like a burden “everyone would be better off without me”) • Saying goodbye (in person or through leaving notes, sending messages) • Getting their affairs in order (giving possessions away, making a will) • Withdrawing from others • Self-destructive behaviours (reckless sex or driving, increased use of drugs, alcohol, other substances)

• Difficulty taking care of personal appearance or living space • Signs of self-harm (unexplained injuries, wearing inappropriate clothing to hide skin)	• Sudden sense of calm (after experiencing extreme pain, some people can suddenly seem calm once they have made the decision to end their life)
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3.4 Providing support

Samaritans recommend that the educational establishment considers providing immediate emotional support to students and staff. It is important to find a balance between the sensitivity to those who may be grieving and in shock, and the need to maintain the educational establishment's routine.

[Samaritans Step by Step](#) will provide guidance regarding the right support at the right time for those bereaved or affected by the suspected death by suicide. Local bereavement organisations such as Cruse and Child Bereavement UK (details in support directory) may also be able to help you deliver support in school. You should contact these organisations if you feel that their support would be helpful.

3.4.1. Support for staff

Ideas on how to support staff include:

- facilitate safe spaces for staff to support each other as peers - if you don't have a dedicated staff room, make sure there is a room allocated for staff to use to support each other if they need to
- engage [Samaritans Step by Step](#) who can provide support directly to staff
- engage the [Stick Team](#) who can conduct a debrief for staff
- check-ins within staff meetings to remind staff of how to access support
- highlight a staff member, with training if required, as a point of contact during this difficult time for the staff to talk about their wellbeing
- ensure all staff are aware of resources they can use to access support
- drop-in sessions with senior leaders/counsellors

3.4.2 Support for pupils:

Ideas on how to support students include:

- **allocate a room in the educational establishment for students to visit if they are feeling upset or vulnerable.** This could be a place for students to meet with a key worker for support.
- **involve the students in discussions about how they want to be supported** – for example, what do they want to do with the chair of the person who died in the classroom? Do they want to keep it where it is for now or do they want to move the classroom around so it feels different? Do they want things to stay the same or do they want to put something like a painting or poem up on the wall that they can use to remember the person?
- **highlight a staff member**, with training, as a point of contact during this difficult time for the school community. Some educational establishments may have a Mental Health Nurse or Lead, who may be suitable for this
- **check-ins** within small groups or class settings
- be proactive about **initiating 1:1 discussions with pupils**: they might find it hard to reach out to access support, so checking in on them and giving them this opportunity is really important
- having a **mental health and wellbeing bulletin board** (in-person and/or virtual) which has information about mental health and bereavement support
- ensure all students are **aware of support services and resources**
- facilitate **safe spaces for students to support each other as peers** (e.g. within class settings)
- make sure **parents are aware of where to get support** for their children and how to spot the signs of their child being in distress
- support them to **prepare for any memorial activities**
- see additional guidance for information on supporting students/staff with SEND

4 Other considerations

4.1 Suicide during the school holidays

It is important that even if a suicide takes place in the school holidays that a school reacts swiftly. This might include:

- Writing a bulletin to all parents informing them of the death and how to communicate the news to their children
- Signposting parents to information and services for their children
- Small-group check-ins on return to school

4.2 Returning to school

It may be useful to provide support to the students in the same class as siblings, close friends and/or witnesses ahead of them returning to the educational establishment after any time off they take. Arranging support with a mental health service could help prepare students and the staff members in the class.

4.3 Funeral arrangements

Funerals can be a difficult time and may be distressing for those affected by the death in the school community. However, it can be an important part of the bereavement process as it acknowledges the death and can offer a chance to say goodbye. It is important to engage with the family to discuss the attendance and involvement of any students and staff before sharing this information with others. If student and staff attendance is approved, the decision to attend should be made on a personal basis and if possible, the educational establishment should be notified of who will be attending.

For staff attending, there should not be an expectation of offering supervision to students or others. If the funeral is held during school hours, it is suggested to maintain routine as usual, but ideally the funeral is recommended to be held away from the educational establishment's premise and out of school hours where possible. For any absences of student or staff on the day of the funeral, which you have not had prior notification of, immediate follow up is recommended to ensure safety.

4.4 Memorials and commemorations

Often those affected by the death may want to arrange a memorial for the deceased as a way to remember them. This could include leaving flowers and cards in an area linked to the person who died and/or at the place of death. It is important to

acknowledge that while a memorial can provide an opportunity for those affected to mourn together, it can be distressing for some.

Safe educational establishments are vital, particularly during this difficult time. To ensure respect for those wanting a memorial site on school grounds, there are some considerations that may be useful:

- Use of a suitable location, where those that would prefer to avoid the memorial can do so
- Memorials should be treated the same for all deaths
- The memorial should not romanticise, glorify, or vilify the deceased or their death
- Monitoring of the memorial location
- A time limit and communication about the memorial (up to two weeks is recommended).

If it is felt that the memorial site on school grounds is not appropriate, this should be explained to the organiser with the upmost sensitivity. It may be helpful to explain that it may increase risk for others. Once the memorial is taken down, the items can be offered to the family.

4.5 Removing records

You should discuss as a team when would be an appropriate time to remove the person's records from systems (e.g. their email address or accounts for online platforms), as well as physical documents (such as their workbooks) to ensure that there is a balance between removing data from the system in a timely manner, and still providing an opportunity for anything which the family might want to keep (such as photographs or pieces of work).

4.6 Anniversaries and birthdays

It is likely that the anniversary of the death, and other significant events such as birthdays, will be an upsetting time for staff and students. It may be useful to acknowledge these dates in advance and prepare additional support if required, particularly for those most affected. The educational establishment may consider sending a card to the family of the deceased as a compassionate gesture.

4.7 Primary schools

Much of the foregoing guidance is appropriate for Primary schools.

The age range of primary pupils, however, means that additional sensitivity is needed by staff in speaking and listening to those pupils.

It is also likely that the school community will be significantly smaller and more local. Communication between school and home will possibly be more personal, as families will be better known by staff.

4.8 What grief and loss can look like in children and young people

Depending on their age, children and young people will understand and experience grief and loss differently. It is quite normal for there to be periods where the child appears as if they have 'got over it'. However, this is often a way of processing what is happening. The grief can often emerge later, or emerge, go away, and then emerge again in a cycle. All ages can and do experience loss and grief.

Early Years (Nursery to Reception)

- Usually see death as temporary and reversible. They may repeatedly ask when the person is coming back.
- They may show signs of sadness, but these are often very short. Instead, you might see recurring moments of sadness, and a lot of death related play, which is their way of trying to process what happened.
- They can also become physically ill, refuse to eat, have disturbed sleep, becoming hyperactive or breaking things, or withdrawing emotionally.
- You might see them losing skills, such as having toileting accidents, becoming clingy, and being fearful of strangers.

Key Stage 1 and 2

- They understand that death is final and may begin to fear about death of close people, or even themselves. You may see them losing skills again.
- They may ask a lot of specific questions about the nature of the death, as a way of understanding, but may not have the language to express their emotions. You may see acting out, or attention seeking behaviours instead.
- They can believe that they caused the death and feel responsible, e.g. by being naughty. They may feel extremely guilty.
- They might refuse to come back into school when school opens again or refuse to be separated from their parents.

Key Stage 3 and 4

- They understand death is final and irreversible, and so may feel depressed or overwhelmed. While they may understand death more like adults, they can often find it difficult to put their feelings into words. They may not show their feelings in case they upset others.
- They may dislike appearing different from peers or friends, so you may see a denial of feelings, and rejection of offers of support.
- They may act recklessly in 'defiance' of death or may become withdrawn.
- There may be quite a lot of problems with peers, and instances of bullying because of the death. Conversely, they may turn to their peers as they don't feel an adult can understand what has happened to them, but in turn may struggle to connect and feel changed by their experiences.

4.9 Staff and pupils with special educational needs

Neurodiversity and bereavement:

Whilst grief and loss are difficult for everyone, this might be exacerbated in neurodiverse people due to differences in how they might connect with their feelings and process information. They might:

- Find it difficult to understand the concept of death
- Be unsure how to behave after someone dies
- May have difficulty knowing how to navigate social events related to bereavement, such as funerals

Understanding and supporting their presentation of grief:

After a loss, neurodiverse people may show the typical signs of grief, such as anger, sadness, restlessness, difficulty eating/sleeping, increased dependence on others, and a loss of previously displayed skills or confidence. They may also show other feelings, such as:

- A failure to grieve or delayed grief
- Aggressive behaviour
- Excitement
- Laughter
- An increase of neurodiversity related traits, such as sensory differences, meltdowns and shutdowns
- Withdrawal
- Worsened ability to organise, plan and concentrate on tasks
- Nightmares

Like all people, unexpected loss might bring about negative behaviours for neurodiverse individuals. Paying close attention to behaviour changes can help you to understand how and when the individual is processing their grief. Be mindful that because neurodiverse people's reactions might be upsetting or unusual, there is a risk that these behaviours are punished rather than supported, which can result in a suppression of their grief response. They may not have the tools they need to express their grief which society understands and accepts, and punishing them for this is both unfair and stops them from being able to grieve authentically.

You can empower the individual by prompting them to share what their grief means to them. What does it look or feel like to them? How does it make them feel (e.g. angry, sad)? What does it make them want to do (e.g. withdraw or be with other people)?

Communicating the news

The news should be delivered by a trusted person who knows the bereaved individual and understands their reactions. Try and make sure the environment is comfortable and safe based on their needs and any potential sensory triggers.

Neurodiverse people can have varying stages of development, so it is essential to not make assumptions about their understanding of the permanence of death and the language surrounding it.

- Tailor the information to their individual needs and levels of understanding
- Avoid euphemisms as these might cause confusion for someone neurodiverse who takes language literally. For example, terms like “we lost Beth” may not communicate the finality of the situation and leaves room for interpretation of assumption that the person might be physically lost and will be found again. The term “passed away” may also be too ambiguous.
- Use clear language, such as “Beth died today, and we aren’t going to see her again”.

Work with the individual’s whole team

If the neurodiverse person is supported by other professionals, try to include these people in the conversation.

Allow them to be included

Often, because neurodiverse people can be perceived to be volatile or vulnerable, people avoid sharing difficult news with them or letting them attend events.

However, giving neurodiverse people the chance to hear the news and be included in the grieving process is vital for their ability to express, experience and work through their feelings and ultimately process grief. For example, concerns about their behaviour might prompt them to be excluded from memorials or funerals, but their inclusion at these events is vital to finalise the loss and begin healing.

Strive to support them to participate in a way that works for them, such as:

- Showing them pictures of the memorial site or funeral location beforehand, or suggesting they visit with family before the event
- Talking them through what usually happens at a funeral
- Explain that they might see people who are very upset or acting differently than usual

4.10 Cultural sensitivity

It is vital to remember that every person who died is from a family and community which is unique. We have come a long way in our openness in talking about suicide, but this is not something that we can assume applies to everybody.

In certain families, communities and faith settings, suicide is still a hugely taboo issue which brings stigma and shame to families who have been bereaved. It is hugely important to have a discussion with the family about what aspects of the news they are comfortable with being shared before you do so, in order to avoid causing the family any further pain or adversity during a time which will already be extremely difficult for them.

It is important when speaking to the family directly that you don't shy away from speaking about the suicide and that you reiterate any support available to them.

It is also worth bearing in mind that in certain faiths, timelines for burial and other commemoration will be different (e.g. Muslim, Jewish and Hindu communities aim to bury or cremate loved ones ideally within 24 hours of the death, whereas Christian communities may take weeks), so your timelines for discussing funerals will depend on the family. It's likely that if the death is being investigated, there might be anxiety from families about the burial taking place, or not being able to take place, within the usual timeframe.

Similarly, you might need to be aware of the young person's identity and factor this in to how you speak about them. For example, if the young person who died identified with a gender which their family did not recognise, it may be worth paying additional sensitivity to ensure that your communications both respect the young person and yet do not cause further distress to grieving families or the school community.

If you do find that there are barriers which make speaking to the family or wider community challenging (for example, if you feel that there are unhelpful cultural judgements being made about the death which are damaging to the community), you could try to find a local religious or community leader who can connect with the school community who might be willing to support you to have difficult conversations through a different perspective.

5 Long-term learning from the death

5.1 Debrief meeting

Within 6 weeks of the incident taking place, a debrief meeting should take place between the school, council staff and any other relevant organisations to discuss the incident, any future potential support and learning moving forward.

5.2 Policy review

After any incident of a suicide within a school community, the senior officer for suicide prevention within public health will use feedback from the school and other parties to review the policy and make any appropriate changes.

5.3 Long-term support

The educational establishment, staff, students, and/or families may want to promote positive mental health and wellbeing moving forward and increase awareness of the local and national services and support available for anyone who may need this.

Events such as school fayres may be an opportunity to promote both positive mental and physical health and wellbeing, linking in with local public health teams, fitness centres and sports clubs, nutritionists, local mental health agencies and more.

It may also be useful to consider holding an information session for parents and carers, with support from a local mental health service if required, this could include general awareness raising for suicide and self-harm risks, promoting services and support available, as well as general discussions for future improvements and more.

APPENDIX A: SERVICE DIRECTORY

Bereavement organisations

Organisation	Support offered	Contact details
<u>Cruse Bereavement Support Birmingham</u>	Counselling and support groups for adults and children, by telephone, email or face-to-face. Their Birmingham team also offer a specialist suicide bereavement group and counselling.	Tel: 0121 687 8010 <u>support@crusebirmingham.co.uk</u>
<u>Edward's Trust</u>	Counselling, support groups, play therapy, wellbeing therapies, social events, resources and training	Tel: 0121 454 1705 <u>admin@edwardstrust.org.uk</u>
<u>Child Bereavement UK</u>	Information and resources on supporting children and young people through bereavement. Their Birmingham team can also support with delivering support to young people, and to bereaved parents.	Tel: 0800 028 8840 <u>birminghamsupport@childbereavementuk.org</u> <u>helpline@childbereavementuk.org</u>
<u>Grief Encounter</u>	Information and resources on supporting children and young people through bereavement	Tel: 0808 802 0111
<u>Beyond the Horizon</u>	1:1 counselling or play therapy to support children 4-18 who have experienced bereavement	Tel: 0121 444 5454 <u>admin@beyondthehorizon.org.uk</u>
<u>Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)</u>	Telephone, email, online and group support for people bereaved by suicide	Tel: 0300 111 5065
<u>Winston's Wish</u>	Through information, on-demand services, bereavement support and counselling, we support young people across the UK to understand their feelings, process their grief and find ways to move forward with hope for a brighter future. We also help the adults who are caring for young grieving people including parents, school staff and healthcare professionals.	Tel: 08088 020 021 <u>ask@winstonswish.org</u>

Mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people

Organisation	Support offered	Contact details
Papyrus UK	Confidential support and practical advice for young people having thoughts of suicide or someone concerned about a young person having thoughts of suicide	Tel: 0800 068 41 41 Text: 88247 pat@papyrus-uk.org
Childline	A helpline for children to call about anything that is worrying them	Tel: 0800 1111
Pause Hubs - Forward Thinking Birmingham	A drop-in service for young people to access wellbeing support, workshops and advice around emotional wellbeing	Digbeth Hub : 21 Digbeth, Birmingham, B5 6BJ Sparkbrook Hub : Sparkbrook Community & Health Centre, 34 Grantham Road, Sparkbrook, Birmingham B11 1LU
Mental Health Service - Forward Thinking Birmingham	Mental health partnership offering treatment services for 0-25 year olds in Birmingham.	To make a referral: here
Kooth	Safe and anonymous digital support via a 1:1 chat service, message, wellbeing activities and more	To sign up: here
Healhub	Heal Hub is a community-led programme that gives young people (12-25) the opportunity to shape their own mental health support.	Tel: 01216223603 Tel: 07562 792 353 MHteam@lyfeproof.co.uk
YoungMinds	Support for children and young people to understand how they're feeling and find ways to feel better	YoungMinds Mental Health Charity For Children And Young People YoungMinds

Mental health and wellbeing support for teachers

Organisation	Support offered	Contact details
Education Support	A charity dedicated to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and education staff.	Tel: 0800 056 2561
Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health 24/7 Helpline	The service operates 24/7 – the helpline provides advice and information to people experiencing mental health difficulties, their families,	Tel: 0121 262 3555

	professionals and the wider public.	
Mental Health & Wellbeing Hubs - Birmingham Mind	The Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health & Wellbeing Hubs is a service delivered in partnership by Birmingham Mind and Creative Support. The service supports adults over the age of 18, under secondary mental health services in Birmingham or Solihull, on GP SMI list or having long term/severe mental health problems.	Tel: 0121 608 8001 mhwh@birminghammind.org

Mental health and wellbeing support for parents and carers

Organisation	Support offered	Contact details
YoungMinds Parents Helpline	Tailored information, advice and support to parents and carers who are concerned about their child or young person's mental health	Tel: 0808 802 5544
Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health 24/7 Helpline	The service operates 24/7 – the helpline provides advice and information to people experiencing mental health difficulties, their families, professionals and the wider public.	Tel: 0121 262 3555
Mental Health & Wellbeing Hubs - Birmingham Mind	The Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health & Wellbeing Hubs is a service delivered in partnership by Birmingham Mind and Creative Support. The service supports adults over the age of 18, under secondary mental health services in Birmingham or Solihull, on GP SMI list or having long term/severe mental health problems.	Tel: 0121 608 8001 mhwh@birminghammind.org

Council contacts

Organisation	Contact details
Emergency Planning	emergencyplanning@birmingham.gov.uk
Educational Psychology	educationalpsychology@birmingham.gov.uk
Education Safeguarding	educationsafeguarding@birmingham.gov.uk
Public Health Suicide Prevention	Hajrah.khan@birmingham.gov.uk
School support service	school.support@birmingham.gov.uk
Governor support service	governors@birmingham.gov.uk

School support

Organisation	Support offered	Contact details
Samaritans Step by Step	Step by Step is a Samaritans service that provides practical support to help schools prepare for and recover from a suspected or attempted suicide. This includes providing information and support to help the school community come to terms with what has happened, prevent stigma and isolation and reduce further risk of suicide.	Tel: 0808 168 2528 Contact the Step by Step team: here
Beyond the Horizon	1:1 therapy services, bereavement groups, training and resources for staff and parents	Tel: 0121 444 5454 enquiries@beyondthehorizon.org.uk
Breathe Education	A single point of access that can assist teachers and early years workers to promote wellbeing in the young people they teach and care for. Teachers and early years workers can use this website and its resources to access evidence-based training materials, resources for lessons and links to local and national services	

STICK team	The Screening, Training, Intervention, Consultation and Knowledge (STICK) Team is available for all schools to provide assessment/screening of CYP, train school professionals, introduce therapeutic interventions, consult on care and provide specialist knowledge. The STICK team has also agreed to deliver debriefs to staff following a suicide in the school community.	bwc.stickfb@nhs.net
Birmingham Education Partnership	Provides training and support to schools to improve mental health and wellbeing in schools	Tel: 0121 285 0924 office@bep.education Mental Health & Wellbeing - Birmingham Education Partnership (bep.education)

Crisis support

Organisation	Support offered	Contact details
Samaritans	Contact Samaritans to talk about whatever is on your mind, including suicidal thoughts.	Tel: 116 123
Forward Thinking Birmingham Crisis Team		Tel: 0300 300 0099 (option 1)
SHOUT	24/7 text support during a crisis	Text 'SHOUT' to 85258
Call 999 or attend A&E	If your or someone's life is at risk (for example a serious injury or an overdose) or if you/they do not feel they can keep themselves or others safe	Tel: 999 Accident & Emergencies: Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham Heartlands Hospital Birmingham Birmingham Children's Hospital

Guidance

Resource link	Provider	Information
After suicide	The Compassionate Friends	A leaflet providing practical and emotional support following the suicide of a child.
Finding the words	Support After Suicide Partnership	How to support someone who has been bereaved by or affected by suicide.
Guidance for reporting on youth suicides	The Samaritans	Guidance for media reporting on youth suicides and suicide clusters.
Guide to Coroner's Services	Support After Suicide Partnership	A guide for bereaved people and others involved in or affected by a coroner investigation or those attending a coroner's inquest.
Help is at hand	Support After Suicide Partnership	Resource for people bereaved through suicide or other unexplained death, and for those helping them
Online safety resources	The Samaritans	Online safety resources providing guidance on staying safe online.
Preparing our child's funeral	The Compassionate Friends	A leaflet that provides information on how to prepare for a child's funeral.
R;pple	R;pple	A tool designed to present a visual prompt when a person searches for harmful keywords or phrases relating to the topic of self-harm or suicide, free for schools.
Samaritans school talks	The Samaritans	Samaritans' branches have trained teams of volunteers, who can visit a school, college, or youth groups to give a talk to young people.
Step by Step resources	The Samaritans	Resources for schools in supporting grief and minimising the risk of further suicides.
Helping children and young people stay safe online	UK Safer Internet Centre	Tips, advice, guides and resources to help keep children and young people safe online for parents and carers, and teachers and school staff.
The Inquest Handbook: a guide for bereaved families, friends and advisors	Support After Suicide Partnership	Provides detailed information on the investigation and inquest procedures after a death.
Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide	The Samaritans	Media guidelines for reporting suicide to find out how to cover suicide and self-harm safely.
Support After A Suicide	Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)	Contains information about coping with suicide, giving support and practical help.

Training

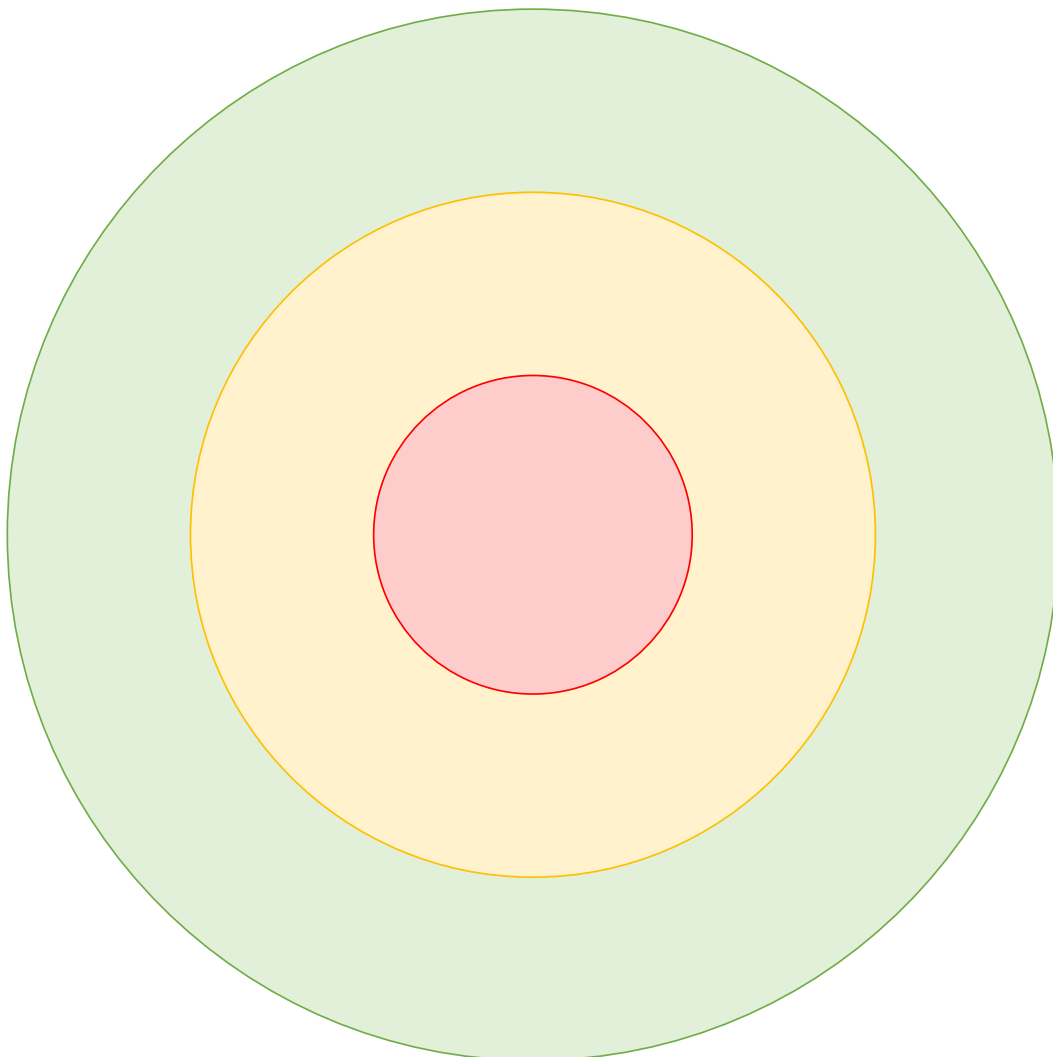
Resource	Description	Type	Access
<u>The Orange Button Scheme</u>	A 3-hour suicide prevention course which gives attendees an orange button to identify themselves as someone who can be safely approached by someone in crisis to talk about thoughts of suicide and be directed towards support	Via Zoom	Fully funded, <u>Booking online</u> via Eventbrite
<u>SPEAK training</u>	A 3.5 hour course providing an introduction to suicide prevention skills following the “Suicide Prevention Explore, Ask, Keep-Safe” model. CPD accredited.	Face-to-face and online	£55, booking online via <u>Papyrus website</u>
<u>DEAL: Developing Emotional Awareness and Listening</u>	Deal is a free resource for teachers and other educational professionals designed to help develop resilience in young people	Online	Free via <u>Samaritans website</u>

Appendix B – Circles of Vulnerability Matrix

Place individuals within each circle accordingly

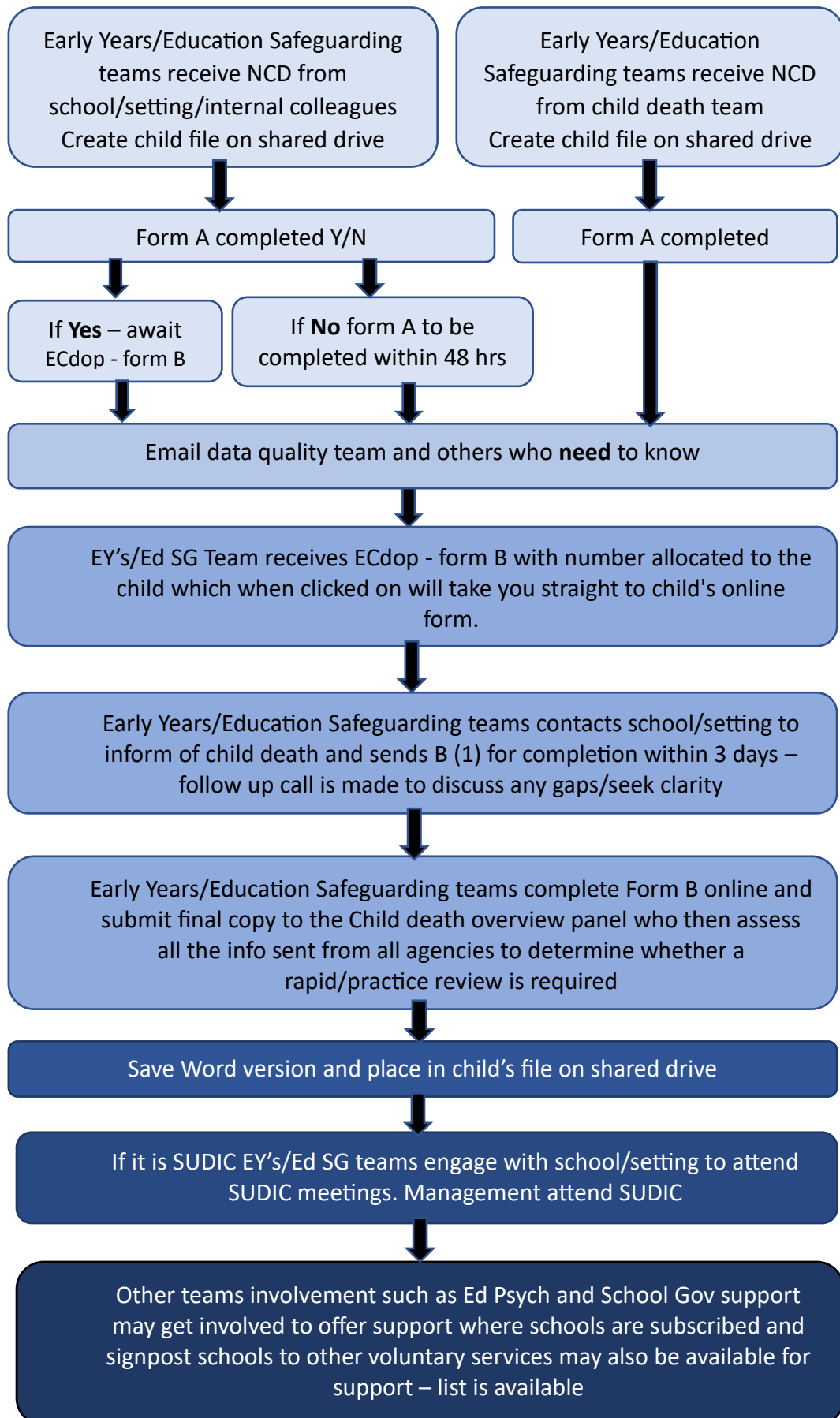
Within each circle, colour code (green: low risk, yellow: medium risk, red: high risk) according to the following criteria and degree of concern.

- Directly involved
- Witnesses
- At greatest risk as part of incident
- Siblings/relations
- Close friendships
- Any perceived culpability/responsibility
- Being blamed/scape-goated
- Displaying emotional distress
- Previous bereavement/trauma
- Pre-existing EBD/mental health issues
- Pre-existing home instability / stress
- Learning difficulties
- Culture and/or language issues



Vulnerable group or individual	Concerns/risk factors	What has been done to help	What remains to be done to help and by whom

APPENDIX C – CHILD DEATH NOTIFICATION PROCESS



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Birmingham City Council Emergency Planning
Birmingham City Council School Improvement
Birmingham City Council Children and Families
Birmingham City Council Public Health for Children & Young People
Birmingham School Health Support Service
North and West Northamptonshire Councils
Beyond the Horizon
Cruse Bereavement Support
Child Bereavement UK
Jervoise School
King Edward VI High School for Girls
Wilson Stuart School
St Thomas Aquinas School
Bellfield Junior School*

Version control

This document is version controlled to ensure relevant and up-to-date information.

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Please contact suicideprevention@birmingham.gov.uk for any questions or comments in relation to this support package. We welcome all feedback and will review this document.