

# Schools Critical Incident Policy

[2024]

[(Guidance Status)]



[www.reading.gov.uk](http://www.reading.gov.uk)



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

<b>Document History</b>	
Version	1.0 (see below)
Status	Draft for discussion
Date	[date]
Target audience	Staff and children in Reading Schools
Ratification	None
Author	HR Employment Services Team

<b>Version control</b>	<b>Reviewers</b>
Version 1.0	Initial draft – [2024]

# Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction .....
- 2. Purpose.....
- 3. Objectives and scope.....
- 4. Definition .....
- 5. Initial Response
- 6. Response Team
- 7. Post Incident Review
- 8. Formation of Post Incident Review Team .....
- 9. Review Process .....
- 10. Appendix 1- Notification Form
- 11. Appendix 2 - Initial Response and response team flow chart
- 12. Appendix 3 - Post Incident review
- 13. Appendix 4 -Post Incident Review Report Template
- 14. Appendix 5 - Support

## 1. Introduction

This guidance outlines the systematic approach for assessing, responding and learning from critical incidents within a school community. The guidance also supports and improves the Council's ability to respond, manage or mitigate future critical incidents.

## 2. Purpose

2.1 A critical incident is one where there has been a death or serious injury within the school community or where the school has had to instigate their Rainbow Plans (their emergency response plan).

2.2 Whilst the primary purpose of this guidance is to ensure that the school, Council and other stakeholders can respond to and learn from critical incidents, schools should also advise the Council where there are multiple less serious incidents which could lead to a critical incident. These are sometimes known as 'rising tide' events. See section 4 below for additional information.

## 3. Objectives and scope

3.1 The aim of the guidance is to:

- enable pertinent information to be gathered quickly.
- ensure that there is suitable support available to all stakeholders including any immediate family and the wider school community.
- ensure communications between all stakeholders is effective.
- Facilitate review of the response to the critical incident identifying causes and lessons learned.
- develop approaches for implementing improvements and mitigating risks to prevent future occurrences.

3.2 This guidance applies to incidents involving school staff, children in schools and others who are participating in any school activities being undertaken either on a school site or off site when there is a school activity being carried out (school trips, sports events and so on).

3.3 The guidance also covers non-work-related critical incidents that occur away from school premises or out of school hours.

3.4 Additionally, the guide also covers emergencies which have resulted in the school losing access to the whole or parts of the premises or key utility or technology. The business continuity aspects are addressed in the Rainbow Plan.

- 3.5 Normal work-related accident reporting processes should still be followed. Where a work-related accident has resulted in a serious injury or death then this guide should also be followed in parallel with the work-related accident reporting processes.

## 4. Definitions

4.1 For the purposes of this guide, a critical incident is one where:

- A member of staff, pupil or someone else working on school grounds or on behalf of the school has suffered life changing injuries, or life-threatening injuries or has died during a work activity.
- A member of staff, pupil or someone else working on behalf of the school during an off-site school activity has suffered life changing injuries, or life-threatening injuries or has died.
- A visitor to the premises who is not carrying out a work activity has suffered life changing injuries, or life-threatening injuries or has died.
- A member of staff or a pupil has suffered life changing injuries, or life-threatening injuries or has died outside of school where the school has had no control or responsibility.
- The school has had to evacuate part or all the premises for an extended period.
- The school has lost access to a utility (electricity, water, gas) for an extended period which will affect the continued safe operation of the school.
- The school has lost access to key IT systems which would affect the safe running of the school.

4.2 A work activity is:

- Any work that was being carried out, including where the work was organised, supervised or performed by school or any of their staff, contractors or volunteers.
- The incident involved any machinery, plant, substances or equipment used in connection with the school's activities.
- The incident involved the condition of the workplace where the accident happened, including the state of the structure or fabric of a building or outside area forming part of the workplace such as the state and design of floors, paving, stairs, lighting etc.

4.3 An emerging 'rising tide' event is where a series of linked incidents or concerns occur which if left unresolved could result in a critical incident. For work-related issues these may be seen as a series of related 'near misses'. Non-work-related incidents may be more difficult to qualify especially for situations where there may be complex welfare or wellbeing concerns. However, whenever there are concerns about an individual or group where there are a series of related incidents then advice should always be sought from the relevant professional team.

## **5. Initial Response – see appendices 1&2**

- 5.1 Essential information should be gathered and recorded on the Critical Incident Notification Form (Appendix 1). The form can be completed by either the school or by the service receiving the contact from the school.
- 5.2 For work-related critical incidents involving a member of staff, contractor or volunteer initial contact should be made with the RBC Health & Safety Team or RBC Human Resources. These teams will coordinate their input and make a rapid assessment to identify which services need to be engaged.
- 5.3 For work-related critical incidents involving a pupil, initial contact should be made with the RBC Health & Safety Team and Executive Director of Children Services/Director of Education. These teams will coordinate their input and make a rapid assessment to identify which services need to be engaged.
- 5.4 For non-work-related critical incidents involving a member of staff or pupil, contact should be made with RBC Human Resources (for staff) or Executive Director of Children Services/Director of Education (for pupils). The team will make a rapid assessment to identify which services need to be engaged.
- 5.6 For non-injury emergency incidents contact should be made with the RBC Emergency Planning Team who will make a rapid assessment to determine which services need to be engaged.
- 5.7 For emerging 'rising tide' events which involve members of staff contact should be made with either the RBC Health & Safety Team or RBC Human Resources as appropriate. For events which involve pupils contact should be made with the Schools Standards Team/Director of Education.
- 5.8 In response to all Critical Incidents, the Executive Director of Children Services/Director of Education will identify a Critical Incident Lead to coordinate immediate support to the school.

## 6. Response Team – see appendix 2

6.1 Following the notification of the critical incident the key services will come together as a Response Team. Responsibility for convening the Response Team will sit with the Director of Education who will also chair the meeting.

6.2 The Response Team will operate using the following principles:

- To establish a lead service and to coordinate the response to the incident. It will do this by identifying priorities, resources, capabilities and any limitations.
- It will establish a shared situational awareness of the incident across the team by sharing information.
- It will establish a joint understanding of risks and agree appropriate control measures.
- Key stakeholders will be identified including the immediate family and wider school community
- Additional partners will be brought into the Response Team as required.
- As the response progresses, will utilise established related policies, systems and processes.
- Be prepared to make decisions to reduce the risks of future occurrences.
- Ensure that any evidence is secured.
- Where appropriate, a joint decision model should be adopted. This is likely to be the case where there are multiple partners involved in the incident.
- Comprehensive notes of all decisions must be kept.

6.3 Critical incidents can impact people beyond the direct school community. Key people to consider in terms of impact are families of staff members, parents of pupils and wider members of the local community. At an early stage the Response Team may allocate a 'Family Liaison Officer' if required. Key duties for that person will be to:

- Establish and maintain a supportive and ethical relationship with families most impacted by the incident, building trust.
- Act as a single point of contact between families and the review team to enable necessary information to be shared with them.
- Update families in a timely manner with all relevant information except where this is confidential, record all contacts and document any requests and/or complaints made by the family to be forwarded for consideration by the Response team.
- Provide information regarding additional services available for families, including signposting to support agencies (appendix 3), so that they can access all available services and support.

- 6.4 For all critical incidents, once the incident response phase has ended a post incident review will be undertaken – see section 8 below.

## 7. Post Incident Review – see appendix 3

- 7.1 An internal review procedure will be conducted following the occurrence of a critical incident and the completion of the response phase. The review process will assess the critical incident to support and improve the council's ability to manage or mitigate future incidents. Additionally, when a life-changing injury or death occurs, an external review may be conducted. Any external review will be commissioned and led by BFfC and RBC /or HR/RBC H&S as appropriate (depending on the nature of the incident). This will include responsibility for setting the terms of reference for an external review, oversight of it and the development/implementation of any action plans arising from the review.
- 7.2 Timeliness of Review: the review will be carried in a timely manner. Conducting a review promptly allows for immediate identification of causes and implementation of corrective measures. It is recommended that reviews be completed within **fourteen working days** after the review team has been formed to maximise effectiveness and minimise the risk of future occurrences. Where the review is complex and cannot be completed within this timeframe, a formal review timetable will be established with a view to completion as soon as reasonably practicable and in all cases no longer than three months after the incident.

## 8. Formation of Post Incident Review Team

- 8.1 The Director of Education will commission the review team and identify members. It will be promptly formed immediately after the response team phase (which would be within three days of the critical incident taking place). The team members will consist of school staff (including governing body members) and relevant Council /Brighter Futures for Children staff.
- 8.2 Roles of review team members:  
Each team member plays a vital role in contributing to a thorough and effective internal review process, with the aim of improving the council's ability to respond to unexpected serious incident and safeguard the well-being of staff and the community. The specific roles and responsibilities of each of the team will be established as part of the process to establish the review.

## 9.0 Review Process – appendix 4

The review process is as follows:

- a. **Evaluation:** The review team will evaluate the immediate response to the event, including communication protocols and coordination with external agencies.
- b. **Analysis:** A thorough analysis of the incident of “how” and “why” the incident occurred and its impact on staff, children and the community will be conducted. The analysis should focus on identifying strengths/weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. It is important to extract lessons learned from the analysis to prevent similar occurrences in the future and to enhance the council's resilience, effectiveness, and adaptability.
- c. **Engagement:** Stakeholder engagement will be prioritised, including (where relevant) gathering input from children (to be directed by the school), parents/guardians, family and staff members, and community partners to provide diverse perspectives. Regular engagement with family members would be undertaken by nominated family liaison person.
- d. **Report:** The review team will prepare a comprehensive report summarising the findings, recommendations, and action plan. This report should be disseminated to relevant stakeholders within the Council, including school leadership and governing bodies. Please refer to the appendix for the report template.
- e. **Confidentiality:** All information shared and discussed during the review process should be treated as confidential, ensuring privacy and respect for individuals affected by the event. Personal data and sensitive information will also be managed in accordance with data protection laws and guidelines.

**f. Implementation and Recommendations:**

- i. Based on the assessment and analysis, the review team will formulate actionable recommendations to enhance preparedness, response, and recovery efforts for future similar incidents.
- ii. The review team will propose that the responsible parties in the council, (such as the Executive Director of Brighter Futures for Children or Director of Education along with governing bodies and school leadership), review and prioritise the recommendations.
- iii. An action plan will be developed to implement the agreed-upon recommendations within specified timelines. Clear accountability and monitoring mechanisms will be put in place.

**g. Monitoring and Evaluation:** The Director/Education Director/School Leadership should devise an approach to enable regular monitoring of the action plan and evaluate its impact.

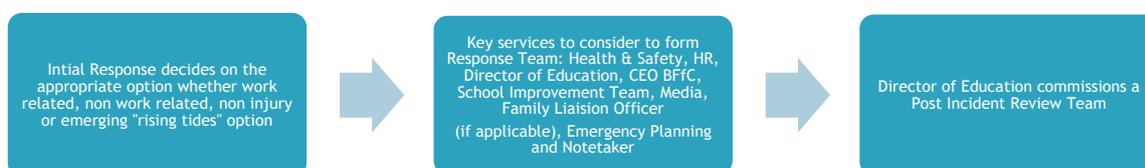
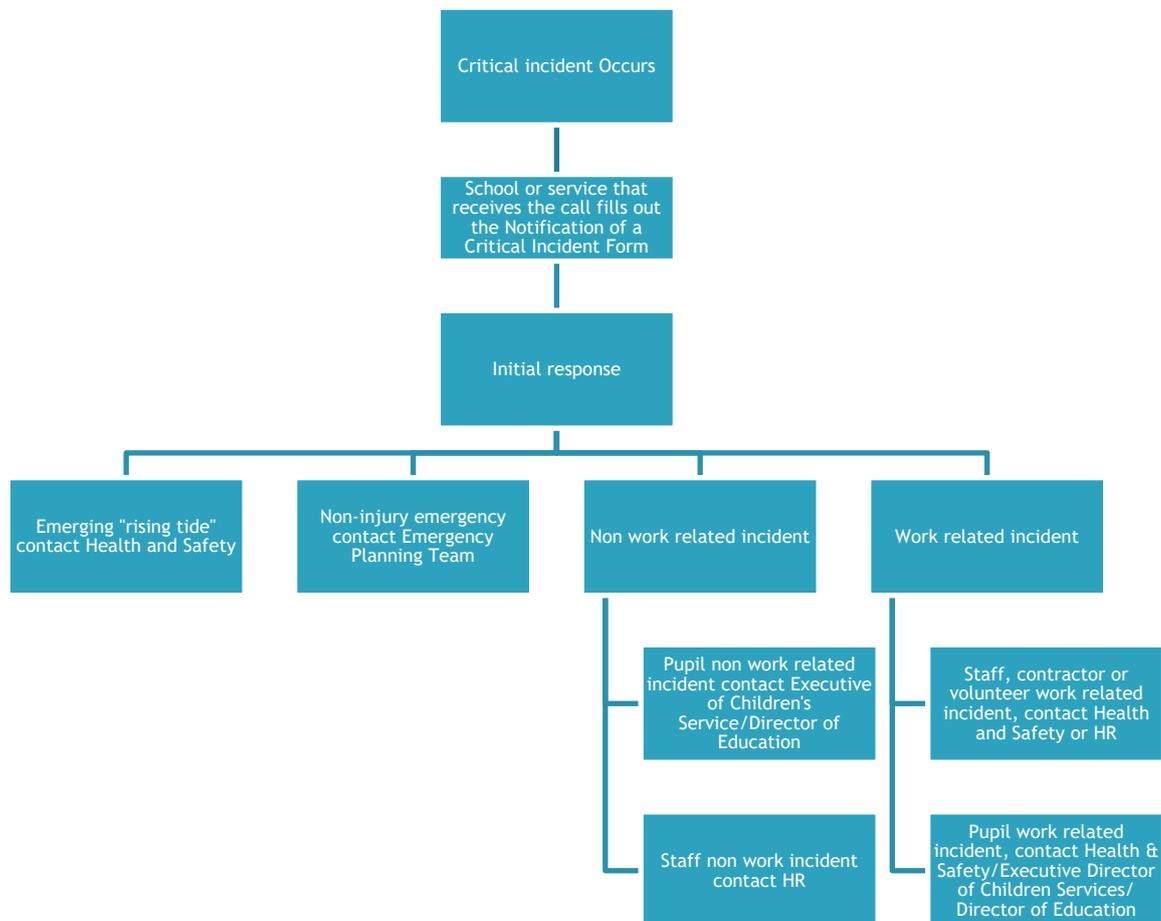
**h. Documentation and Records:** Maintain comprehensive documentation of the review process, including meeting minutes, findings, recommendations, and action plans, for reference, audit, and transparency purposes. Ensure compliance with data protection laws and guidelines when handling sensitive information and personal data.

**i. Continuous Improvement and Adjustment:**

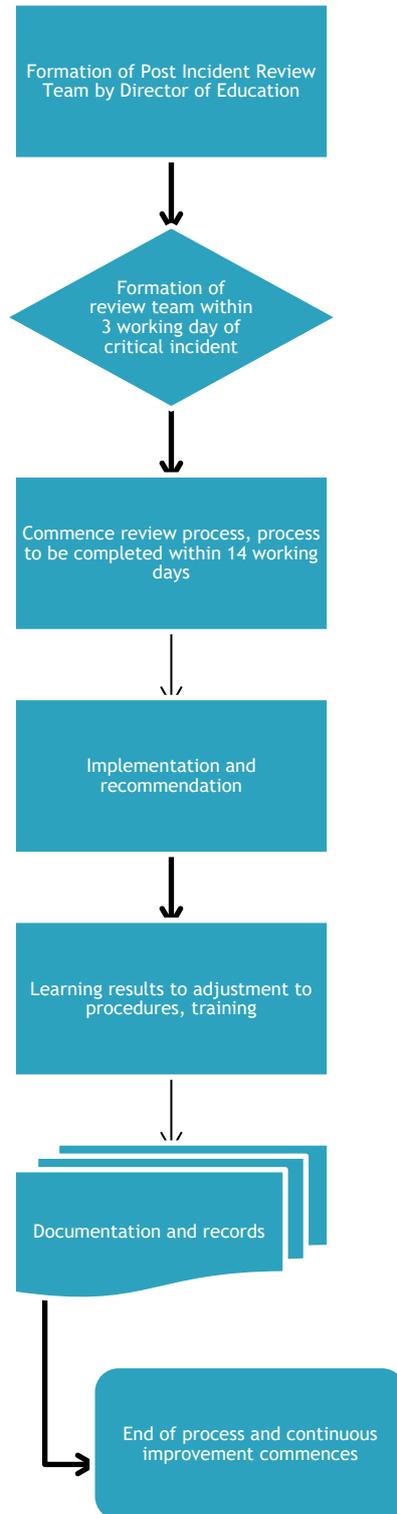
To enhance effectiveness and adaptability in responding to unexpected serious incident, review processes should incorporate feedback from stakeholders and lessons learned from previous incident(s). This could include opportunities for ongoing training, including well-being initiatives, mentoring, coaching, and support, and/or other actions to enhance preparedness and response capabilities. Where adjustments are needed in existing policies, procedures, or training programs to enhance the council's resilience, these should be notified to the Director of Education/ RBC as appropriate.

**Appendix 1- Notification form – attached separately**

## Appendix 2: Initial Response and Response Team Flow Chart



### Appendix 3: Post Incident Review Stage



## Appendix 4

### INTERNAL REVIEW REPORT TEMPLATE

#### 1.0 Introduction

*State clearly what the report is responding to, e.g., serious unexpected critical incident*

*N.B The report should not go beyond what is relevant.*

*In addition, review team members should list all the material (witness statements, documents, photos etc) that they have considered in reaching their opinion.*

*Suggest if any further information would be required to reach a final view*

*A statement should be included that the analysis and opinions expressed in the report are the review teams own work; otherwise describe the extent of any collaborative work.*

#### 2.0 Background information

*This should give an uncontroversial background to the case.*

*Describe the documentation/information available upon which your report is based, i.e., the facts as seen or put on which the summary opinion is based.*

*Refer to any earlier drafts.*

#### 2.1 Date of Incident:

#### 2.2 School:

#### 2.3 Review Team Members:

#### 2.4 Report Date:

#### 2.5 Names of those involved

*Abbreviations are used throughout this report.*

### 3. Critical Incident Details

*Event described with impacts.*

#### 4. Timeline

*Of evidence used for the review, this includes from start of the incident to notification, the formation of the Response Team. Any visits. Enquiries from the Family involve. Media interactions Decisions made.*

#### 5. Assessment and Analysis

*Describe what, went well and will not, did not go well. Describe the facts and assumptions differentiating between each and clearly referencing their source; what in your opinion were the causative factors; discuss the adequacy of existing practices/systems of work; indicate whether action taken was foreseeable and whether the chosen controls were correctly chosen on the given information at the time.*

*Discuss any other potential other options and why these are not accepted.*

*Mention any mitigating circumstances.*

#### 6. Communication

*Internally. With Stakeholders. With family members. Media*

#### 7. Summary of Areas of Improvement and Lessons Learned

The following details the concerns identified:

Concern Area	Concern Detail
	•
	•
	•
	•
	•
	•
	•

#### 9. Adjustment and Other Issues raised

*Policies/procedures to be amended*

#### 10. Any Information Still Outstanding

#### 11. Recommendations for Improvement

*Details and timelines including who is responsible for the actions*

## **12. Conclusions**

*Remember to **limit the response to those matters which are relevant.***

*Summarise the cause(s) leading to the actions taken e.g., whether any process itself contributed to the incident. Indicate clearly whether it was reasonably practicable to do more*

## Appendix 5:

Organisations offering support for staff, families, parents and children:

**Barnardo's** – A charity that aims to support the lives of the UK's most vulnerable children. Web: <http://www.barnardos.org.uk>

**Brake Care** – When someone you love dies in a road crash, or you, or a loved one, is seriously injured, it is devastating. Brake Care, a division of Brake, provides help and support for bereaved and injured victims. Brake also works to end road casualties and make communities safer with its campaigns. There is also a 'Rose Garden' section for memories of victims. Web: [www.brake.org.uk](http://www.brake.org.uk) Tel: 01484 559909. Brake Care helpline for road crash victims: 0808 8000 401.

**Child Bereavement UK** – Supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement. The website offers a range of training opportunities and includes information about an awareness programme for schools. Email: [support@childbereavementuk.org](mailto:support@childbereavementuk.org). Professionally trained support workers are available to take calls from 9am-5pm Monday-Friday. Helpline Tel: 0800 02 888 40. Web: [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

**Childhood Bereavement Network** – This website promotes the development of best practice in supporting bereaved children, develops resources for bereaved children and those working with them, signposts professionals and families to local and national support and works with Government and Parliament to develop policy. It includes a section for school staff about how to develop the curriculum and pastoral support. Tel: 0207 843 6309 Web: [www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

**Child Line** – Call free on 0800 1111 (24 hr). Tel: 0800 884444 (for children in care 6.00pm to 10.00pm). Web: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

**Cruse Bereavement Care** – A national organisation for the widowed and their children. Address: Central Office, P.O. Box 800, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 1RG. Tel: Helpline 0844 477 9400. Admin: 020 8939 9530. Web: [www.cruse.org.uk](http://www.cruse.org.uk) or [www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk) Email: [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk).

**Papyrus (prevention of young suicide)** – Papyrus offers UK resources and support for those dealing with suicide, depression or emotional distress – particularly teenagers and young adults. HOPE Line UK – the Papyrus helpline, is open from 7.00pm to 10.00pm, Monday to Friday and 2.00pm to 5.00pm at weekends. It is staffed by professionally qualified advisers who can give support, practical advice and information to anyone who is concerned that a young person they know may be suicidal. Web: [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org) Tel: 0800 068 4141.

**Rainbows Bereavement Support Great Britain** – A national charity aimed to support children, young people and adults who are grieving a significant loss in their lives.

Offers help for children suffering bereavement or other forms of loss. Also supports communities in reviewing or developing their own bereavement policy and procedures. Offers training and programmes for schools in bereavement and loss. Tel: 01582 724 106. [Web: http://www.rainbowsgb.org](http://www.rainbowsgb.org). Email: Rainbows.dc@virgin.net.

**Samaritans** – Confidential support to anyone passing through a crisis, in despair, or thinking of taking their life. [Web: www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) Reading branch, 59a Cholmeley Rd, Berkshire, Reading RG1 3NB (11am-10pm). Tel: 0330 094 5717 or 08457 909090 (National Number).

**SAMM (Support After Murder or Manslaughter)** – Offer understanding and support to families and friends, who have been bereaved as a result of murder and manslaughter, through the mutual support of others who have suffered a similar tragedy. [Helpline Tel: 0121 451 1618; Tel: 0845 872 3440; Web: www.samm.org.uk](http://www.samm.org.uk). Tel: 020 7735 3838.

**Seasons for Growth (England and Wales)** – Offers information about a loss and grief peer-group education programme to support young people aged 6-18 years and adults who are affected by change, loss and grief. Tel: 020 7823 3311. [Web: www.seasonsforgrowth.co.uk](http://www.seasonsforgrowth.co.uk). E-mail: [info@seasonsforgrowth.co.uk](mailto:info@seasonsforgrowth.co.uk).

**SOBS (Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide)** – Meet the needs and break the isolation of those bereaved by the suicide of a close relative or friend. SOBS offer emotional and practical support in a number of ways: telephone contacts, bereavement packs, group meetings (in a number of locations), one-day conferences and residential events. SOBS can also provide information relating to practical issues and problems. SOBS' aim is to provide a safe, confidential environment, in which bereaved people can share their experiences and feelings, so giving and gaining support from each other. Tel: 0300 111 5065 (9.00am to 9.00pm every day). [Web: www.uk-sobs.org.uk](http://www.uk-sobs.org.uk).

**Sudden Trauma Information Service Helpline** – Outline self-help strategies and practical methods of managing as well as signposting to professionals and therapeutic interventions. Tel: 0845 367 0998. [Web: www.stish.org](http://www.stish.org).

**The Bereavement Trust** – A national multilingual free phone helpline. A listening ear, information and support in time of sorrow, by trained volunteers. Also helps to develop children's gardens in cemeteries. General helpline: 0800 435 455 (6pm-10pm). Asian helpline (Gujarati and Urdu) Tel: 0800 9177 416. Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin) helpline Tel: 0800 0304 236. [Web: www.bereavement-trust.org.uk](http://www.bereavement-trust.org.uk)

**The Child Death Helpline** – This helpline is run from Great Ormond Street Hospital, but is open to all. The helpline is a listening service that offers emotional support to all those affected by the death of a child, whether family, friends or professionals. It is staffed by bereaved parents who are supervised by trained counsellors. The helpline

is open 365 days a year, every evening 7.00pm to 10.00pm, Monday to Friday mornings 10.00am to 1.00pm and Wednesday afternoons 1.00pm to 4.00pm. Tel: 0800 282 986; 0808 800 6019. Web: [www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk](http://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk)

**The Compassionate Friends (TCF)** – The helpline is open 365 days a year, 10am-4pm and 6.30pm-10.30pm and calls are answered by a bereaved parent. Compassionate Friends offers support for bereaved parents, including local groups (call number above for local contact details) and befriending. They also offer specialised support groups for grandparents, siblings and parents who have lost their only child. Their website contains many useful leaflets regarding bereavement. They also offer support where a child has taken his or her own life – Shadow of Suicide (SoS). Tel: 0345 123 2304. Web: [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)

**The Compassionate Friends (TCF) Sibling Support** – The Compassionate Friends now have a separate website for siblings at Web: [www.tcfsiblingsupport.org.uk](http://www.tcfsiblingsupport.org.uk) Together for Short Lives is a charity for children and young people with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions and their carers and families. Web: <http://www.togetherforshortlives.org.uk/>. Helpline: 0808 8088 100.

**UK Trauma Council** – resources to support educational communities in providing a comprehensive and compassionate response to traumatic events that affect children and young people in their care [Critical Incidents in Educational Communities - UK Trauma Council](#)

**Winston's Wish** – A registered charity providing a grief support programme for children and parents, with a wide range of excellent resource materials available. Head Office Westmoreland House 80-86 Bath Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL53 7JT. Tel: Enquires 01242 515157 Helpline 0845 2030405. Web: [www.winstonswish.org.uk](http://www.winstonswish.org.uk) Please refer to a comprehensive book list available on the Winston's Wish website.