



Critical Incidents & Trauma Management in schools, academies and other Settings

2025/2026 Edition

www.norfolkepss.org.uk

www.norfolk.gov.uk/childcare

Substantive changes	None
Last reviewed	September 2025 by Natalie Paine
Ratified by LGB	October 2025
Next Review	September 2026

Schools, academies and other educational settings are strongly recommended to prepare plans for a possible critical incident, and to use the Red Book structure with this in mind. Whilst this has originated from our work in schools, other educational settings may wish to adapt this to their needs. Please ensure that your governors/trustees are fully aware of your plans. You should revise this book annually; you will find the latest copy here:

<http://www.norfolkepss.org.uk/information/preparing-responding-critical-incidents/>

(once registered and logged in).

In particular, settings should consider forming an incident management group. Individuals with specific responsibilities should be identified and recorded in the Red Book in advance of an incident and revised when an incident occurs.

The book should continue to work as an aide memoir/checklist but also provides space to allow schools/academies/settings to customise it with their own information.

A Critical Incident may be defined as:

An event or events, usually sudden, which involve the experience of significant personal distress to a level which potentially overwhelms normal responses, procedures and coping strategies and which is likely to have emotional and organisational consequences.

Critical Incident Support Line - 07623 912974

(8am.- 6pm. Mon-Fri during term time only, 9am. – 5pm. during school holidays.)

Norfolk County Council - 0344 8008020 (out of hours – serious incident)

What it's for:

The Critical Incident Support Line should be used to inform and request support from the Local Authority when a traumatic or tragic event has occurred. A critical incident may be the unexpected death of a child, or an adult closely associated with the school/setting. Equally, it may be an event causing injuries to pupils or staff which results in temporary or long-term disablement including road traffic accidents (school trip, school transport) or other events such as a fire.

Support can also be offered in relation to some incidents where the LADO is involved, as well as when you are expecting the death of a child or member of staff due to illness. A member of staff being injured by a pupil may be experienced as traumatic, and support can be made available. This is not an exhaustive list, please do get in touch if you may need support. If you need an urgent response, please call the CI support line, otherwise email using details on page 4.

Who do I speak to?

When you ring the number, an automated voice will say *"Welcome to Page One Communications. We are taking messages for the Critical Incident Service, hours of operation are Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. If you are calling outside of those hours and need an urgent response relating to a death or another serious incident, please call the out of hours number for Norfolk County Council"*

on 0344 8008020 and speak to the emergency duty team. Otherwise, please hold the line for an operator."

You will then be put through to an operator, who will take a message. You can leave a message any time, but a response out of hours is not guaranteed. Please provide your details, the name of your school/setting, contact phone number (main school and alternative landline/mobile number) and a brief outline of what has occurred. This information will be immediately relayed to the Critical Incident Specialist Support Lead.

Please be aware that whilst you can leave a message at any time, hours of operation for the Critical Incident response via the pager number are Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 pm. during term time only, 9am. – 5pm. during school holidays.

What happens next?

Once you have made contact through the Critical Incident Support Line, you will be contacted by the Critical Incident & Specialist Support Lead who will take further information and provide support and advice. A range of key individuals and services will be alerted as appropriate; foremost among these will be professionals trained in offering psychological support/trauma management (Critical Incident Team – further information on page 13.) They will be able to support the setting as it comes to terms with the consequences of a critical incident.

While critical incidents are, thankfully, rare, their effects can be profound and schools are encouraged to plan for the eventuality, to consider who might be affected and how best they might be supported. Training is available to prepare for Critical Incidents: Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Practice training - Norfolk Schools and Learning Providers - Norfolk County Council

Out of hours:

If you need an urgent response out of hours, relating to a death or another serious incident, please call the out of hours number 0344 8008020 (option 1, then option 1) and speak to the Emergency Duty Team. There may be a wait for a response as the emergency duty team deals with a range of emergencies relating to adults and children.

What the Critical Incident Support Line is not for:

The Critical Incident Support Line is not for events like boiler failures, gas leaks or loss of water. Please follow your business continuity plan.

The Critical Incident Support Line does not provide a counselling service for employees suffering stress. NCC Employees can contact Norfolk Support Line on: **0800 169 7676**. For staff working for other organisations you may wish to contact your manager or your HR Service to enquire about support available to you. You may wish to access the Education Support Line

If you are a professional concerned about a child in Norfolk and want to speak to someone about a safeguarding issue, please call the Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS), on 0344 800 8021, Mon – Fri 9 am – 5pm. Out of hours please call 0344 8008020.

If you have a concern regarding an adult working or involved in the running of an early years / childcare setting, please email LADO@norfolk.gov.uk. The LADO consultation/referral form can be found at <https://www.norfolkscb.org/people-working-with-children/how-to-raise-a-concern/>. If you require immediate support because of the significant impact on your setting (see definition of critical incidents), you can also call the Critical Incident Line to access support.

Non-urgent advice:

If you would like non-urgent advice about a parental death or a general bereavement issue, please email the Critical Incident & Specialist Support Leads (Dr Bianca Finger-Berry and Cherie Pointon): cs.criticalincidentservice@norfolk.gov.uk.

NORFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Emergency Contacts

In the event of a critical incident, you should phone the following number for assistance.

07623 912974 (Mon-Fri 8am-6pm term time, 9am.-5pm school holidays)

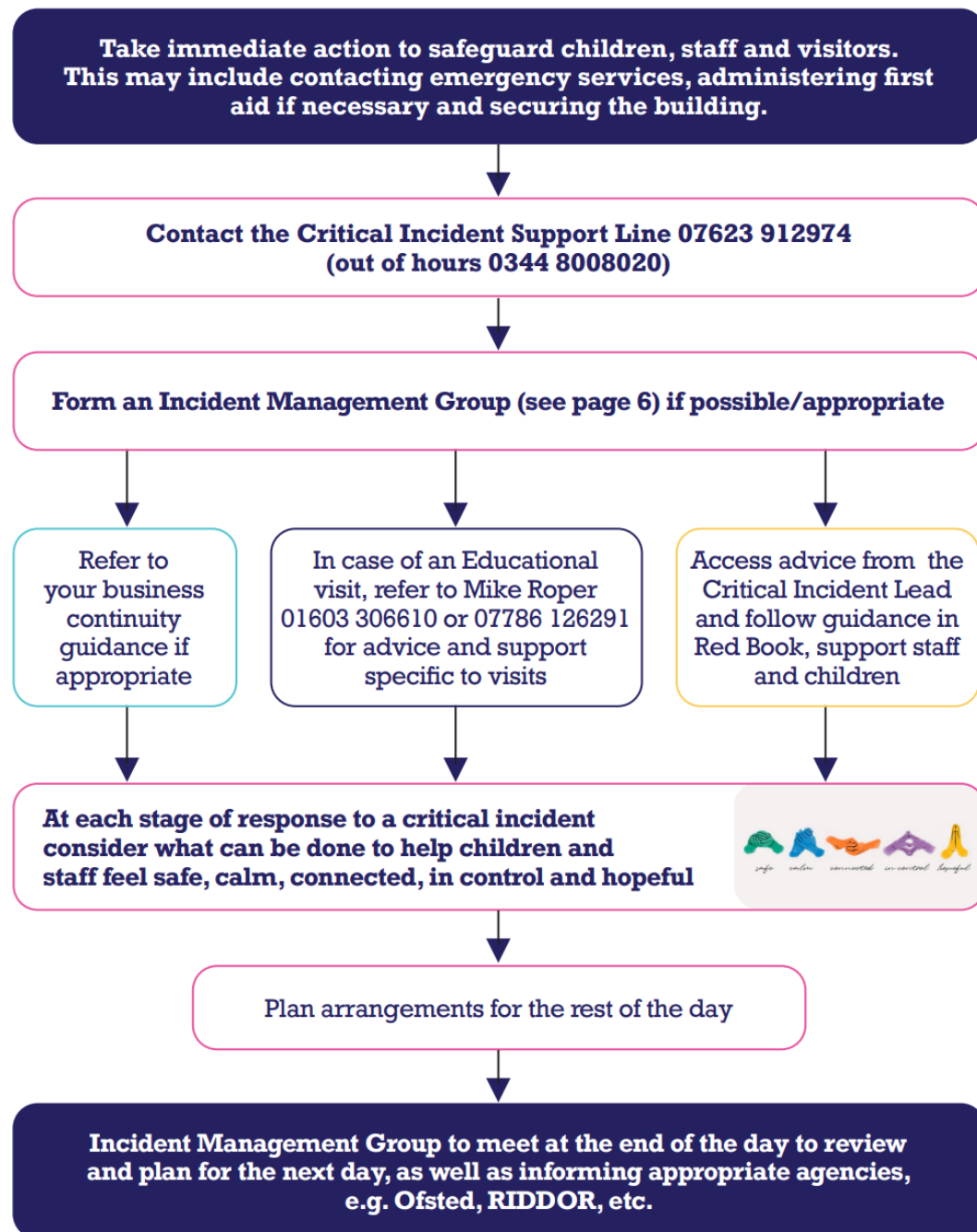
0344 8008020 (out of hours – serious incident)

Please provide the following information:

Name of caller
Name of setting
Contact number
Brief outline of the incident

Please be aware that the Critical Incident Response operational times as above, although you can leave a message at any time. If you need an urgent response relating to a serious incident at other times, please call the out of hours number (0344 8008020) and speak to the Emergency Duty Team - there may be a wait.

Actions in the event of a Critical Incident



When forming your Incident Management Group, you may consider allocating the following roles, which should be revised in the event of an incident. In a small school, the headteacher might take on several roles. Consider what roles are needed in your specific case and whether you need additional roles, e.g. a community/parent link.

Incident Management Group	Name	Revised name
Incident Lead	Natalie Paine	
Lead - children's well-being (pastoral lead)	Lewis Swatman	
Lead - staff well-being (senior designated mental health lead)	Kate Coupland	
Designated safeguarding lead link	Lewis Swatman	
Lead to link with affected families	Kirsty Ward	
SENDCO	Jake Lawrence	
Link governor/trustee for incidents	Rolf Purvis	
Site Manager/Business Manager	John Sayer	
Communications (Media) Lead	Rhiannon Evans-Ali	
Other	Rhiannon Evans-Ali	

This document focuses on the needs of children and staff, therefore there will be no other reference to the property manager. Please follow your business continuity plan if appropriate and consider the business continuity guidance on the Norfolk County Council website. <https://www.settings.norfolk.gov.uk/setting-management/emergencies/managing-emergencies-and-business-continuity>

- **Ensure that essential details of the incident are taken and recorded (Incident Lead)**

What has happened? Date and time of the incident? The location of the incident? Details of any injuries at the scene? Who else witnessed the incident/ are at the scene? Who knows about what has happened? Who else in the setting community is likely to be affected? What advice have the emergency services given? What action has already been taken? Any other important information?	
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- **Notify the LA of the incident and request assistance if required (Incident Lead). Liaise with the LA Critical Incident Specialist Support Lead re. support needed (see p.12 for CI offer).**
- **Ensure a dedicated emergency line is operational** (alternative number for services supporting the school, in case the main school number will be busy with parental calls/closed – consider mobile phone reception.)

Person Responsible number: Natalie Paine (number to shared if and when needed)

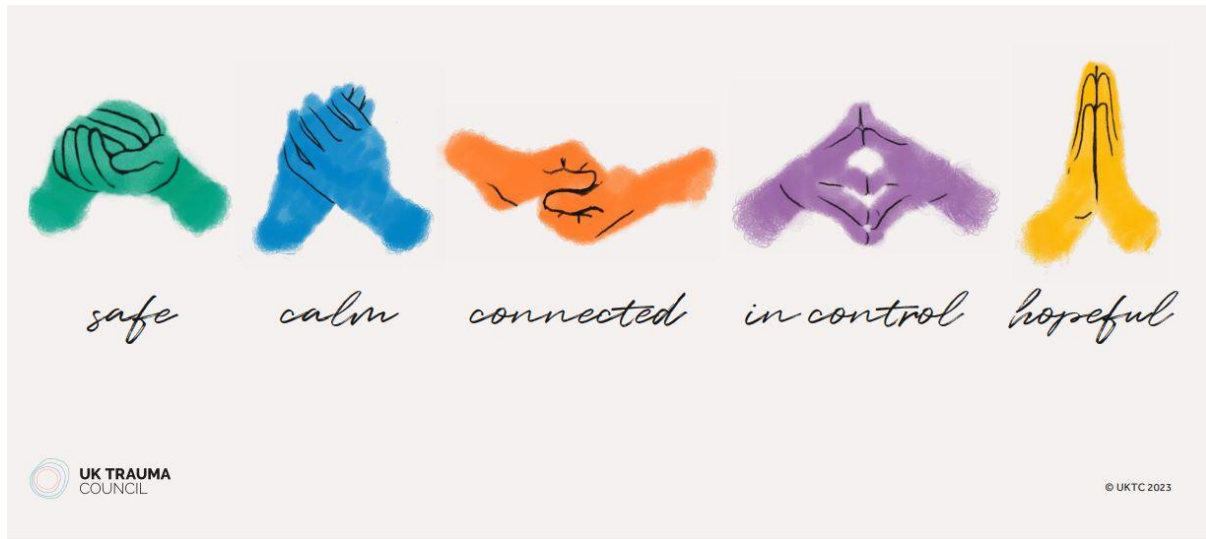
Alternate telephone number: mobile phone used for learning walk (number to be shared when/if needed)

- **If the incident is likely to attract media attention, you may wish to contact your media officer. You may have your own media officer through your organisation or buy into NCC media support (01603 228888 or pressoffice@norfolk.gov.uk, out of hours 01603 307799). If your setting has not subscribed, you can purchase support on an hourly basis. It is important to ensure that those potentially receiving calls from the media know what the settings' response is and are able to respond appropriately (*also see p.15*).**
- **Contact governors/ trustees as appropriate**
Please see Governor Guidance on Page 15

Governor /trustee to contact (Name)	Tel Number
Rolf Purvis (Chair of LGB)	Available if needed
Lucy Scott (CEO)	Available if needed

- **Identify vulnerable children, young people and adults at the time of the incident (welfare lead):**
- **Establish procedure for informing children** (*see guidelines, p12*) *consider consent*
Person Responsible: Lewis Swatman
- **Ensure appropriate letter / email home to parents** (*sample letters are included in this booklet -p14*) *normally to be agreed with affected family*
Person Responsible: Natalie Paine
- **Review the day and plan arrangements for the next day, consider support required for staff and children (Incident Management Group). Inform appropriate agencies.**
Person Responsible: Natalie Paine

Principles to support the psychological recovery of the school community



The principles above are based on research by Hobfall et al. (2007) which identifies five principles for recovery after traumatic events.

There is no one-size-fits all road to recover after a critical incident, as every event and every educational community is unique. (UK Trauma Council, Critical incidents in educational communities, 2023)

More information on good practice around medium and ongoing response can also be found in the above linked resource.

Suggested guidelines for informing children about a death (please adapt for different circumstances)

Preparation

Information about the circumstances (as far as possible/appropriate) of the death/incident need to be shared with staff (remember mid-day, administrative and part-time staff) as soon as you can. There needs to be clarity about what information can be shared with staff and children, e.g. what is in the public domain, what has been agreed with the family. It is helpful if all children and young people can be told within the same period. Ideally, they should be informed in small tutor/class groups. We also have some social stories/scripts available.

If any member of staff feels unable to tell their group, they need to know that this is okay and alternative arrangements should be made.

1. Preparing to share information with class / group

Take a moment to think about how you are going to share the news. Be aware of children/young people who have recently been bereaved or who are particularly vulnerable.

2. Sharing what has happened – (you may have been given a script)

Always give a warning shot: *I need to share some sad news with you all. Xxx* (brief description of who/position in the setting) *has died/explanation of incident*. Explain in small steps as some children may not be able to take in lots of information at once. Give information about the circumstances/cause of death if possible/appropriate. Use age appropriate, simple and clear language, avoid euphemisms.

If children ask questions, be clear about what information can be shared with them. Answer questions open and honestly if you can. It is okay to say *'I don't know'* or *'We don't know yet'* or *'Maybe we will be able to find out later'*.

3. Acknowledge that different people will react/feel differently

All possible responses/ emotions are fine. Say that it is also okay to be happy and have fun, or not feel anything at all.

4. Getting Support

Tell children they should talk to someone if they feel really upset, worried, anxious, can't sleep, etc. Advise where / who they can go to for support (eg pastoral staff, Critical incident team etc.)

5. Peer Support

Encourage pupils to support each other –*this is a really important time to look after each other; and be kind to others. Remember that we might all react in different ways. If you are worried about a friend, please talk to one of the adults in school.*

6. Give time for individual responses

Allow children to talk about the person who died/the incident. Consider facilitating means of expressing feelings such as painting, drawing, writing, etc. Make a decision about whether this is appropriate depending on how close the children were to the person who died/will be affected by the incident, or whether to proceed with lessons.

"There will be opportunities for us all to have time to think, talk and remember ... in our own way. We will talk to you again at some point about how we want to do this."

"Normal routines will continue." Talk about any exceptions and arrangements, e.g. support available for pupils who are very upset, (e.g. Critical Incident Team), how to access this support. Inform pupils that there will be a letter/email home to parents/carers.

Social stories and visual scripts are available upon request.

Critical incident support team

The Critical Incident Support Team supports schools and settings following a critical or traumatic incident. We are a team of different professionals working for Norfolk Children's Services, with backgrounds in educational psychology, teaching, social work, early years and other relevant areas. We work in partnership with other colleagues in Children's Services as well as various agencies such as Health, Police, East Anglia Children's Hospice (EACH) and our local bereavement charity Nelson's Journey.

We are a team that provides emotional support, practical advice and containment to promote the well-being of the school community in times of crises, and to empower everyone in building resilience. We use evidence-based approaches to offer a quick response in a compassionate and empathic manner.

Advice and support for the Headteacher/Senior Leader can include helping the school/setting assess the immediate demands of the situation, help identify children and staff who may be particularly vulnerable and need extra support, help consider best ways to share what has happened with the school community, to give information about when children and staff might need additional help, and to assist the headteacher/senior leader to keep the running of the school/setting as normal as possible in the given circumstances. We can offer psychological support to children, young people and staff in the immediate period following a critical incident or trauma.

We work to the five principles of recovery (Hobfall et al, 2007), which are: Sense of Safety, Calming, Self- and Community Efficacy, Connectedness, Hope.

We will share our knowledge about the impact of traumatic events and bereavement on children and adults, and in addition to providing immediate support we can also discuss further what children and staff might need in the longer term. We can support the setting in identifying those who are experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress and provide information about identifying and accessing specialist help. In some circumstances we can provide trauma focussed interventions to children/adults. We also have some specific resources to support children with additional needs. We have a [Padlet](#) available with a range of information.

We can offer follow-up offer support and advice on issues such as funerals, memorials, inquests, anniversaries, etc., as well as training on bereavement and trauma.

Sample letter when a pupil/member of staff has died

Feel free to use this sample letter as a basis for a letter from your school/setting, you can adapt and change it to your particular circumstances. You may also want to write a completely different letter, but the following might be useful to consider. We strongly suggest to discuss the content of the letter with the family involved. In some circumstances it may not be appropriate to share the name of the person who died with the whole school community. Feel free to talk to us further about

the content of the letter. If you are sending the letter out electronically, please ensure that it is **not** sent to the parents/carers of the pupil who died.

Dear Parent/Carer,

It is with great sadness that I have to inform you about the (sudden) death of xxx (name if agreed with the family), one of our pupils/members of staff in Year x. The children were told this morning by their class teacher/form tutor.

Xxx (or a child/member of staff in our school/ in year x) died as a result of/ or the full detail surrounding the death are not known at this stage – but children have been reassured that this is something that does not happen very often. Your children may or may not want to talk about it, but it is likely that they will need your special care, attention and reassurance at this difficult time.

We are all deeply affected by the death, but we are trying, for the children's sake, to keep the school as normal as possible over the coming days, whilst allowing the children opportunities to talk if they want to. Trained staff from the Critical Incident Team are helping to support us through this difficult time. If you feel that your child needs extra support, please let us know.

Our thoughts are with the family, and the whole school community sends them our most sincere sympathy and support.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,
Xxx Headteacher

Guidance for Governors/Trustees

We strongly advise that Governors review the whole of the Red Book at the first Governor Meeting in the Autumn Term. A Link Governor should be identified. The role of the Link Governor is to share relevant information with all governors and agree with the headteacher how governors can best support the school. Academy Trusts should ensure that all of their academies have completed relevant sections in the Red Book. For LA schools, support is available from Governor Services who will be informed of critical incidents if schools have contacted the LA for support.

Responsibilities of Governors/Academy Trusts

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, employers have a responsibility for the protection of the employees' health, safety and welfare (so far as is reasonably practicable), this includes taking steps to prevent psychological harm. As part of the duty of care, if there was a breach and it was foreseeable that this would lead to psychological injury, a judgement will be made as to whether the employer took all necessary steps to limit or prevent the outcome. Employers also need to ensure that non-employees are not exposed to risks in their health and safety. The Education and Inspection Act places a duty on governing bodies to promote the well-being of pupils.

Role of Governors/Trustees in a Critical Incident

Governors/Trustees should be offering their support to the headteacher and ask how they can best support the school given the leadership is tasked with operationally managing the situation. They may be requested to agree extra resources from the school budget, e.g. if supply staff are needed to provide extra capacity. The Link Governor/Trustee should be responsible for communicating with other Governors/Trustees, possibly through Governor Hub.

Governors/Trustees should be providing leadership support to the headteacher which may include providing emotional support. Regular check-ins should be agreed to see how the headteacher is coping and if additional support is needed for their school community including staff, pupils and parents/carers, e.g. access support from the LA Critical Incident Team if appropriate. Governors may also be a link to the local community. School closures for funerals, which would have to be agreed by Governors/Trustees, should be avoided if possible and creative solutions should be explored, whilst allowing all staff who wish to attend a funeral to go. Governors/Trustees may be asked to represent the school and as such may be asked to attend a funeral on behalf of a school, e.g. if a member of staff died.

Dealing with the media

Governors/Trustees should be aware of the publicity and media attention that sometimes follows Critical incidents. Therefore, plans should be in place for who will be supporting the school in dealing with the media, whether that is through their own media service or buying into NCC media support (see P.8), otherwise Governors/Trustees may be required to assist. Schools should always be prepared to respond to a request from the media. Contact details should be taken to enable a carefully constructed response – individual governors/trustees should never respond directly to the media. Everyone should be aware that any communication going out to members of the community may be used by the media – names should usually only be released with consent of the family and further advice may need to be sought. It is usually better to give some information to the media and pro-actively manage what the school would wish to share, e.g. about the support that is offered to the school community.