

Some ways to help older children/young people following a bereavement or critical incident<sup>1</sup>

**SYMPATHETIC LISTENING.** Young people need familiar, trusted adults who will enable them to talk about what has happened and express how they are feeling.

**ACKNOWLEDGING THE YOUNG PERSON'S LOSS DIRECTLY.** This lets the young person know that you are aware of what has happened. It also gives the young person permission to talk about his/her grief.

**ACCURATE AND SWIFT INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED WILL HELP TO DISPEL RUMOURS.** Give information and answer questions honestly. This includes saying "you don't know" if you don't. What young people are not told, they will make up or try to find out from friends, acquaintances or the media. What young people are not told they may imagine, which may be far worse.

**DO NOT FEEL THAT YOU NEED TO HIDE YOUR OWN FEELINGS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE.** Young people, especially adolescents are likely to be very self-conscious about expressing their feelings. Boys in particular may feel that they are "too big to cry". It is likely to help young people to see that it is normal to be upset by death and that crying or showing emotion is nothing to be embarrassed about.

**THIS IS LIKELY TO BE A FIRST EXPERIENCE OF DEATH FOR SOME YOUNG PEOPLE.** Young people will look to the adults around them as a guide as to how they should behave.

**BE AWARE OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO MAY BE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE** because of this event triggering emotional reactions to experiences of their own, either past or present.

**HELP THE YOUNG PEOPLE TO EXPRESS THEIR GRIEF WHILST STILL MAINTAINING FAMILIAR STRUCTURE AND ROUTINES.** This will provide some sense of normality and help to give a sense of security. Some young people may wish to talk about what has happened, make cards or write letters to the family. Others may take more time to absorb what has happened and prefer to maintain their normal routine. A balance needs to be struck between modelling emotionally healthy ways of coping and offering security by maintaining familiar routines and structures.

**ADJUST WORK EXPECTATIONS.** The quality and quantity of work may be reduced possible for quite a long period. Make allowances and where appropriate inform external agencies for external assessments. Consult with the young person about whether to record what has happened in the pupils' school records so that information is available as appropriate for other schools/colleges in due course.

**ENCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE TO CONTRIBUTE TO MEMEORIALS.** Adolescents may find it helpful to generate ideas for a lasting memorial and in due

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the work of the Bereavement & Critical Incident Team, Telford & Wrekin & Shropshire County Council Educational Psychology Service

course and with the family's agreement, help to organise a collection. They should also be invited to contribute to a memorial service with their memories of the person who has died.