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|  **Providing Support in the event of a Suicide**Guidance for Essex Schools and Education Settings**Essex Educational Psychology** September 2024 |

**Why Suicide is different to other types of sudden death.**

No matter how a person dies there are similar responses, emotions and experiences that people have.  The tasks of grieving that may be relatable to everyone.  However; death by suicide can be experienced differently. This information sheet aims to outline some of these differences, which might be useful to consider when we are supporting people grieving due to a death by suicide, or a sudden death that may in future be deemed a suicide by the coroner.

**Stigma:** The idea of a person ending their own life is a very emotive topic and can be a difficult subject area to talk openly about.  Reservations about discussing it have created a stigma.  People can feel reluctant to talk about it due to fear or unease or shame or worry that talking about it might make it happen. We need to feel able to name sudden death and suicide (where we are able to) and not be fearful of the word.

**Intense grief:**

When a person dies by suicide the shock for people who knew and loved them can be huge.  The sudden and unexpected nature of this kind of death can be traumatic for some people.   Sometimes people who are bereaved by suicide might become more isolated themselves because of the stigma issues outlined above.

**All feelings accompanying grief can be experienced more extremely,** such as:

* anger (at the person who died, at others, themselves and at the world in general)
* guilt (how did I not know, should I have done something?  Feeling responsible for what happened) This can often lead to dwelling on the "what-ifs"
* shock / sadness
* fear and worry about the safety and wellbeing of others and themselves

**How to minimise the risk of Contagion**

Contagion is the increase in the vulnerability of students in the event of a sudden death or death by suicide within a community – this could be an immediate increase or increase over time.

**Key ways to minimise contagion:**

* Offer emotional support and access to support services as needed
* Acknowledge emotive terminology e.g. sudden death or death by suicide (be clear on language used and do not refer to event as suicide unless this has been legally determined).
* Do not focus on method of suicide, or report on this at all. Stick to the basic facts as known.
* Sensitive press coverage and publicity is key
* Advise staff on key things to look out for and avenues of support for all
* Support friends / peer group with how to support one another, what to do if they are worried about a friend and encourage sharing thoughts with adults
* Be sensitive around tributes (avoid shrines) these can appear attractive to other vulnerable young people. (Keep flower tributes time limited and private)
* Longer term memorials might be better focused on fundraising to support interests of person who has died or mental health / wellbeing charities, rather than permanent personally named tributes (this could be the same for any kind of bereavement the school experiences).

**Identifying vulnerable young people and other members of your community:**

* Gather information from systems already operational in school, e.g. SEND / Pastoral systems, encourage staff to share and feedback information
* In relation to specific incidents the Educational Psychology team can assist you in using tools such as the Circles of Vulnerability (*European School Psychology Centre for Training)* to think about people who fall into the following categories:
	+ - Physical proximity: close to or at the incident (saw or heard)
		- Social proximity: knew the person who died (might not be an immediately obvious link)
		- Vulnerability: a person or family member who is vulnerable either through previous experiences and/or temperament.

**What to do when you have concerns:**

* Use the existing systems within school; pastoral support systems, key adult roles to promote **quality relationships and connectedness**.

**Useful website**

Below is a link to an organisation called Support After Suicide where more guidance is available

[Help is at hand – Support After Suicide](https://supportaftersuicide.org.uk/resource/help-is-at-hand/)

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