

Guidance for Dealing with a Sudden or Traumatic Event, Episode or Incident of a Child or Young Person



Comprehensive Guide for Educational Settings and Early Years Providers

Gloucestershire Child Death Overview Panel



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Foreword:

This pack has been developed by the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) in conjunction with professional Partners. To assist with the making of this pack, information has been gathered from Head Teachers who have experienced a sudden or traumatic event, episode or incident of a child or young person, the Child Death Overview Panel, Health Services, Educational Psychology Service and research currently available.

The purpose of the pack is to provide a comprehensive guide to support you, your children and families, it includes:

- Checklist of things to consider
- Immediate assistance available
- Support for families, children and staff
- Measures to help prevent further tragedies

Where there is a child death or traumatic event in any circumstance, the pre-school, school or college will play an essential role in assisting the bereaved family, the child or young person's friends and staff who work closely with them. It is hoped that this pack will be a useful resource to call on in the most stressful of times.

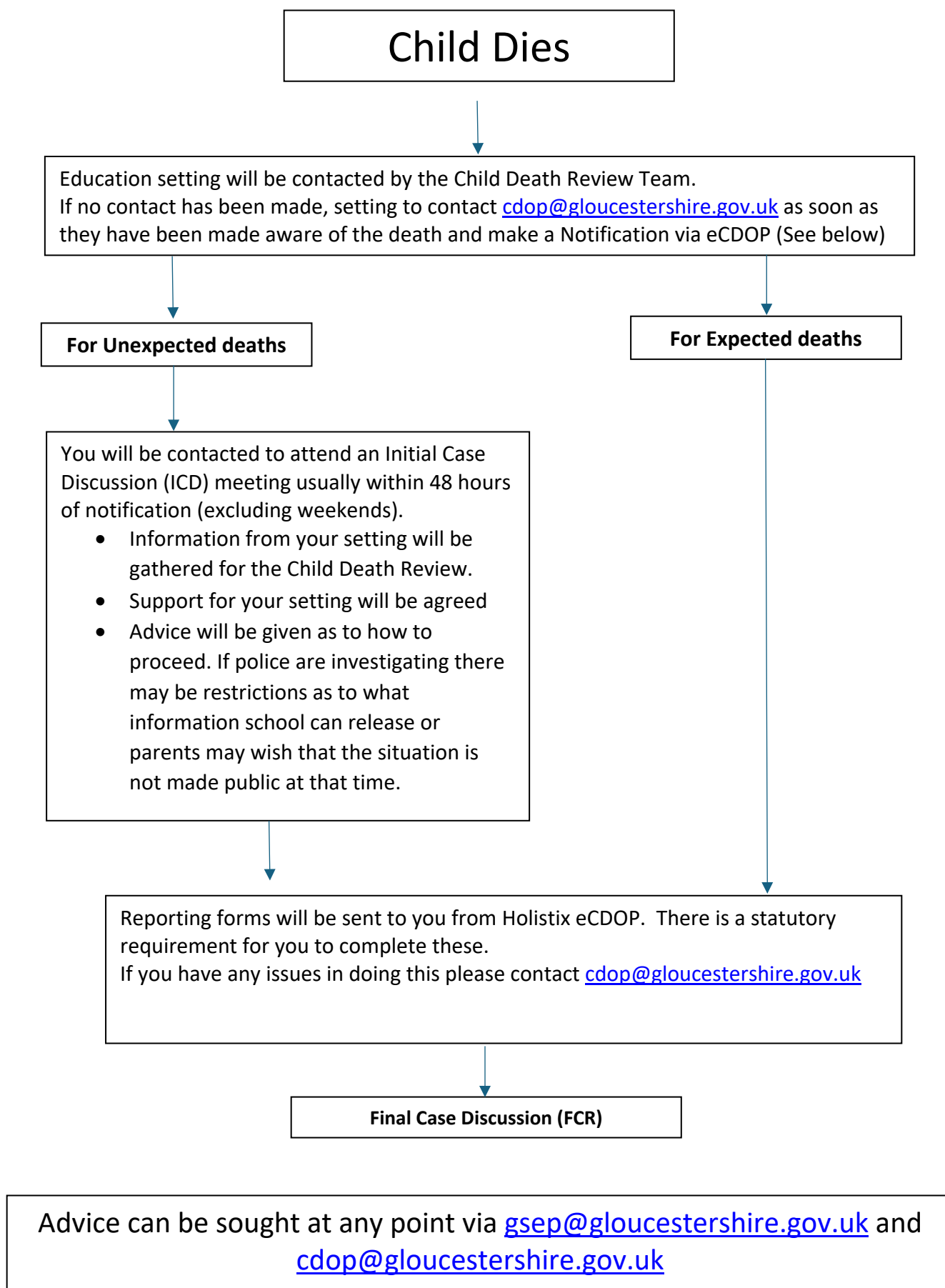
Child Death Review Process

Each death of a child is a tragedy for their family, including any siblings, and subsequent enquiries and investigations should keep an appropriate balance between forensic and medical requirements and the family's need for support. A minority of unexpected deaths are the consequence of abuse or neglect or are found to have abuse or neglect as an associated factor. In all cases, enquiries should seek to understand the reasons for the child's death, address the possible needs of other children in the household, the needs of all family members, and other children well known to the child. It should also consider any lessons to be learnt about how best to safeguard and promote children's welfare in the future.

This is a mandatory process (Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023) together with the current high standard of practice and multi-agency working within Gloucestershire. This has provided the opportunity to establish good practice and working within clear management strategies, enabling a high quality of service to families.

For more information in relation to Gloucestershire's Child Death Review Process please see: Gloucestershire Child Death Review Published Arrangements (Protocol) 2024. www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/gscp

The following flowchart is a brief over view of the Child Death Process and your role



Definitions

Unexpected Death

An unexplained death is defined as a death of an infant or child (under the age of 18 years old) which:

- Was not anticipated as a significant possibility 24 hours before death; or
- Where was a similarly unexpected collapse or incident leading to or precipitating the events which led to the death

Initial Case Discussion

Usually within 48 hours following a child's unexpected death all professionals who have been involved with the child in life or at the time of death will be invited to attend an Initial Case Discussion, this will also include representatives from Social Care, Police, Health and the Child Death Review Team. This will be arranged by the Child Death Review Coordinator (CDRC).

The purpose of this meeting is to share your agency information and to discuss plans to support the family, other children and staff who may have been affected by the child's death.

Notes of the meeting will be compiled by the Child Death Review Coordinator and will be held only by the Child Death Review Team for reference. A report of the meeting may be requested if the matter is referred for a further safeguarding review.

Final Case Discussion

The Designated Doctor for Unexplained Deaths or a representative will convene and chair the Final Case Discussion following receipt of the reporting forms and final results of the post mortem examination (if one has been carried out).

The meeting will include professionals who knew the child and family and those involved in investigating the death, you will be supported and informed of what is included in meetings. The purpose of this meeting is to share information to identify the cause of death and/or those factors that may have contributed to the death, and then to plan future care for the family or other children affected by the tragedy.

Potential learning points may also be identified which may influence service provision for their children.

It is important to note that you may be called to other meetings such as a Rapid Review/LSCPR during the process. GSEP will be available to support you and recognise how difficult it may be for you and your children, families and staff.

Guidance for Educational Settings Including Early Years in the Event of a Sudden, Traumatic Incident of a Child or Young Person

When a child or young person dies unexpectedly, staff and children will be shocked and distressed. Among other things, unexpected deaths might be due to a sudden illness, a road traffic (or other) incident or abuse. If the death is due to suspected suicide, there will be additional considerations. Staff and children are likely to have additional questions and will want to know if they could have done anything to prevent death.

In the event of any death of a child, the educational setting/Early Years provider will be notified by the CDRT (if not already by the parents/community) and will be invited to the Initial Case Discussion. Educational settings/ Early Years settings have found these meetings beneficial to attend, so you may wish to find staff to cover so you can make yourself available. (See above CDRT information)

Issues to consider immediately:

Support for educational setting/Early Years Providers

- Contact Educational Psychology Service (EPS) 01452 328165. They will prioritise your setting and visit immediately offering assistance. (The CDRT will also contact this service for you)
- Gather your staff and offer a chance for them to process the devastating news, support one another and hear the way forward to be able to support the children and families. Its Okay not to be Okay and the offer of Occupational Health should be provided.
- GSEP will also be available to support leaders in the setting, and with permission, by pairing with another leader who may have experienced something similar.
- Consider who will take the lead in your school and ensure they have cover as their normal workload will possibly need delegating.
- Be mindful the setting may have police and/or press presence, how will the school manage this with minimal disturbance at a time of mourning?
- Consider events, activities trips etc and how to navigate these

Support for children and young people

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/education-and-learning/educational-psychology-service-eps/traumatic-events/>

- EPS can offer support and advise the setting on how best to do this
- GHLL have a wealth of support on their website for class, groups and individuals
- Talk Well (previously TiC+) and Young Mind Matter also a useful provision in supporting children & young people
- Include those who may be perpetrators of crime

Support for staff

- Don't overlook the impact on staff. EPS or GSEP can offer support such as counselling or reflective supervision
- Staff may need time and support with personal items found in the setting belonging to the child/young person, rearranging seating in class.
- Occupational Health and their own GP may also be a useful professional to consider
- Consider wider staff, such as transport drivers, mentors etc.

Check educational settings and Early Years providers records and create a family tree

It is important to recognise any other relatives attending the setting (e.g. siblings, cousins, other extended family members who may have different surnames) as they may also need particular support. Where you know the child/young person has siblings that attends another setting, please let GSEP or CDOP aware of this. If the setting has information regarding an absent parent, you will need to inform the CDRT so they can make sure that parent is included.

Consider carefully how you will contact the child's/young person's family

- This will depend on how well you know the family and the circumstances at the time, but a single point of contact within the setting may be helpful to the beavered family.
- Have someone with you on your first visit (possibly your deputy or pastoral lead) if you are going to visit the parents at their home.
- Treat both parents equally, especially consider this where parents are separated
- Be guided by the parents and don't try to rush them or take over
- Do they have a faith and their wishes at that time

Consider the child's/young person's immediate friendship group

- Pastoral support to be offered to friendship groups, partners in your setting and others
- Social media network of friends
- Clubs, faith groups and centers the child/young person may have used (Please let GSEP or CDOP aware of these so they can be contacted for support also).
- Families of the close friendships and signpost them to support

Use a Critical Incident Book

A central recording system to note telephone calls, visitors, actions, wishes and requests—this will help you keep abreast on communication and aid your memory in these busy and stressful times.

Make use of local charities

Charity business cards left around your setting on noticeboards etc. for children/young people, parents and staff etc. to access at their time of need.

Alert your settings site team

Small groups may want to gather and/or leave the site, who will need to be alerted, is there a space in your setting which could accommodate reflection?

Pastoral Support

Grieving is natural and everyone needs time to grieve, we all move through the stages of grieve differently, however, if some are not coming to terms with grief then further pastoral support or counselling may be more appropriate. Older children sometimes use social media to record thoughts. Ask staff to ensure on-line safety is paramount and the account holder will remove inappropriate messages. EPS, Talk Well (previously TIC+) can also be a helpful resource

Media—Gloucestershire County Council Communications Team - 01452 427554

Will be able to guide you through any press interest. Notify your office staff of this likelihood and offer them assistance in knowing what to say. On-line press releases can be especially damaging to children, young people, families and staff particularly when emotive language is used. Comment pages on websites for press allow outrageous comments from people which is difficult to manage, ensure you and your staff do not comment. Email for further support communications@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Consider setting up a book of condolence

Children, staff and parents may wish to sign and leave a message of thought. This can be given to the family at a later date, allowing you to check comments first. Some settings set up a memory box for cards which can be made into an album as time passes.

Flowers

It is likely that flowers will be left at your setting in a prominent place, ensure these are treated with respect and consider a date when you will collect the cards and remove the flowers. Maybe discuss this with parents, check the cards before giving them to parents

Start thinking about the funeral

- Flowers and donations
- Supply staff for those in your setting who may wish to pay their respects
- Safety of the children/young people who wish to attend
- Older children who may be able to drive, encourage them to drive with someone or not when in a state of stress/agitation
- Consider those who may be going to a funeral for the first time, what will they see, what is the process, what do they wear, where do they stand etc.

- Consider different faiths and time frames involved
- Is it a funeral or a celebration of life?
- What will the day look like for your setting, including wrap around care and transport agencies

Later considerations

Consider attendance at the funeral

The families wishes should be paramount. Key staff members and children/young people may wish to attend, share the families wishes and support them with the day; it maybe that you do something in your setting, or those who wish to go have the knowledge of what to expect and how high emotions can be during the day. Seek advice from the Education & Inclusion Team on how you record attendance for the children and young people who attend including parental permission.

Consider how best to gather and return the child's/young person's possessions

If police are involved you should check with them before emptying any lockers or handing over any of the child's possessions.

Ensure lockers/drawers are emptied with respect. This needs to be sympathetically done in a planned way, ensuring time is allowed for this. Parents may want to go through possessions with school staff, particularly if in a residential setting. Medical equipment will need to be returned which is specific to the child/young person. Consider what to do if the parents don't want any possessions. If exams results are due after the time of death ask the parents how they would like to receive these.

Parent Requests

Grieving parents requests might be difficult to accommodate especially around birthdays and/or anniversaries. Speak to EPS or bereavement charities for support and guidance.

Coroner's Inquest

If there is going to be an inquest this will be held within a few months of the death. There is likely to be media interest, consider who will attend and plan what the key messages are and stick to it. GCC Media Communication Team can support and give advice. It is not helpful for other young people to attend.

Additional Considerations in the Case of a Traumatic Death that could be Suicide

It is important not to talk about death as being 'Suicide' until this is confirmed. Usually this does not happen until the Coroners Inquest; however, there might be witnesses to the death or the family might call it a suicide before this time. The traumatic death of a child/young person is particularly sensitive and emotive. Police may come into school for further questioning, staff and children may ask themselves if they could have prevented it. In addition to the point in Chapter 2, when there is a traumatic death educational settings including Early Years providers will also need to consider:

Questions from other parents

Lots of schools will send a letter home to parents advising of the death a child/young person in the setting. School will need to consider this carefully and speak to the bereaved parents first, use caution as there may be a suggestion that something in school may have contributed to the traumatic death such as exam pressure or bullying.

You may consider a higher volume of staff at the settings gate or at parents evenings to assist in answering parental questions. Remember feelings are long lasting and very strong so such considerations will need to be extended for as long as necessary.

While the fact that a child/young person has died may be disclosed immediately, information about the cause of death should not be disclosed to the setting until the family have been consulted. If the death has been declared as suicide but the family does not want it disclosed, someone from the school who has a good relationship with the family should be designated to contact them to explain that the setting is talking about the death amongst themselves, if the family refuse to permit disclosure, the setting can state, *“the family has requested that information about the cause of death not to be shared at this time”* and can nevertheless use the opportunity to talk about the phenomenon of suicide: *“we know there has been a lot of talk about whether this was a suicide death. Since this subject of suicide has been raised, we want to take this opportunity to give you accurate information about suicide in general, ways to prevent it, and how to get help if you or someone you know is feeling depressed or may be suicidal”*.

Permanent Memorials and Plaques

Advice from charities is that permanent memorials are not beneficial to the setting and their community in the case of a traumatic death which has deemed to be suicide. This is because they can become a place to visit for anyone who feels low or inclined towards suicide themselves. Gardens, trees etc. also need careful thought around maintenance, who and when has access to it, what happens if its dies, gets damaged? Change of leadership and staff over time, what happens then, how would the family feel?

Core values of the setting

Values should be reiterated, suicides are rare but can draw staff in to questioning what the settings core values are. It's important to remember staff might need support and direction, this can be obtained from Occupational Heath, GP, Counsellor and charities.

Age of the child/young person

This makes a huge difference on how the setting reacts to suicide. For instance the difference between a year 6 child and a Year 13 young person and how their peer groups react and how staff react. Seek advice from EPS.

Anniversaries

Anniversaries of any death but especially traumatic deaths or those identified with suicide need to be handled carefully. It is likely that children and young people will return to the site of the death. Speak to them and ensure they feel supported without dwelling on the anniversary. Remember new members of staff may not know what has happened and could be unprepared for the reactions. Check social media platforms to help you gauge the feelings of the community. Children transitioning to another setting may also need navigating.

USEFUL CONTACTS FOR EDUCATION AND EARLY YEARS SETTINGS

Gloucestershire Child Death Review Process – Support and Information

[Child Death Review Process | Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children's Partnership](#)

Safeguarding for Educational Settings

[Traded services for educational settings | Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children's Partnership](#)

Educational Psychology Service

[Educational Psychology Service \(EPS\) | Gloucestershire County Council](#)

Gloucester Media Communications Team – GCC

[Communication team | Gloucestershire County Council](#)

Occupational Health

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/schoolsnet/gcc-plus/staff/occupational-health/>

GHLL

[Home : Gloucestershire Healthy Living and Learning](#)

Glos Families

[Glofamilies Directory](#)

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2wish
www.2wish.org.uk
01443 853125



The Lullaby Trust
www.lullabytrust.org.uk 0808 802 6868



Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS)
www.uk-sands.org.uk
0808 164 3332 (National Helpline)



Miscarriage Association
www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk
01924 200799 (National Helpline – M-F 09.00-16.00)



Child Death Helpline
www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk
0808 800 6019 (National Helpline – M-F 10.00-13.00
& T&W 13.00 – 16.00 & 19.00-22.00)



Child Bereavement UK www.childbereavementuk.org 01494 568900



Compassionate Friends
www.helpline@tcf.org.uk
0345 123 2304 (National Helpline – 7 days 10.00-16.00 & 19.00-22.00)



CRUSE Bereavement Care
www.cruse.org.uk
01242 252518 (Local helpline)



Winstons Wish www.winstonswish.org.uk General Enquiries: 01242 515157



Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)
www.uk-sobs.org.uk
0300 111 5065 (National Helpline 7 days)
01452 371945 (local support group)



Meningitis Trust www.meningitisnow.org Helpline: 0808 801 0388



The UK Sepsis Trust www.meningitisnow.org Support Line: 0800 389 6255



Sunflowers is founded by people who know the pain and trauma of losing a loved one to suicide.
Tel: 01453 826990