



ENFIELD  
THRIVES TOGETHER

Barnet, Enfield and Haringey  
Mental Health NHS Trust



*A University Teaching Trust*



**SHARING DIFFICULT NEWS**  
A BRIEF GUIDE TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS AND  
TEACHING STAFF DURING THE  
CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

27TH APRIL 2020

In the face of a global pandemic, senior leads and school staff may be in a position of sharing sad and difficult news with colleagues and parents regarding the health and wellbeing of their school community, including bereavement.

Talking about illness, death and dying is challenging at the best of times. In order to support schools, we have reviewed some of the research and pulled together key ideas to support schools in delivering difficult news.

1. **There is no right or wrong way to feel** and lots of difficult emotions might come up. Feelings of sadness, confusion, shock and anger are all valid, normal and understandable responses. Grief and upset can also present as physical experiences such as fatigue, difficulty sleeping or eating, and nausea.

Acknowledging and making sense of our own thoughts and feelings can make it easier to talk to others about theirs. Thinking about our self-care needs will be important.

2. **What matters is how we deliver the information.**

While emotional upset following difficult news is understandable, delivering it in a way that is sensitive, timely and supportive can reduce longer term feelings of stress and distress (both for the person receiving the news, and the person who gives the news). 'Giving difficult news well' can impact on a person's ability to psychologically adjust and adapt, and provides opportunities to explore emotional needs and offer further support.

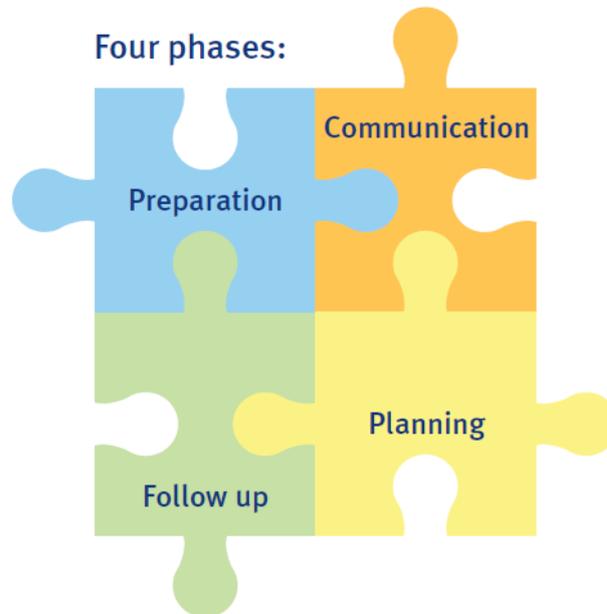
---

**3. Remembering the skills you already have and review existing protocols-** At these uncertain times, it will be helpful to plan who will be doing what - reviewing existing school protocols and making necessary adaptations, given that many staff are working remotely can be containing and supportive. For example, if a staff member receives news from a parent, who should they let know and what will happen next? Thinking about who will share news with staff and parents, and what help they might need from others to do this. If you haven't already, it will be helpful to assign key roles within the senior leadership team.

**4. Not doing it alone. Getting support from colleagues, professionals and leaders in your community** -discussing how to share difficult news with colleagues or other professionals linked to your school, provides an opportunity to think about what you might say, how you might say it, and to talk through any concerns. Role play can be a helpful way to rehearse and build confidence before going ahead. Remember that staff members and parents may have experienced bereavements in their own families so it's important to take this into account. It's important not feel guilty if you are unable to deliver news for whatever reason - seek support and plan for who could help. Some schools might also want to seek advice from faith leaders that support their school community.

---

## 5. Four phases of delivering difficult news (Adapted from The Royal College of Nursing):



a. **Preparation and Pacing** - thinking ahead about what information you share, with whom and when, and the different stages is important. For example, you might share with staff first, and then as a team decide what you share with the wider school community. It will be important to respect the family's wishes as much as possible with regards to this. Following school bereavement protocols can support everyone in the process and prevent unnecessary delay. With school staff, you might think about where you give the news. Making sure there is adequate time afterwards for staff to process it and talk together (or be alone if they wish), without going straight to a lesson, meeting or home. Helping them to think about their own self-care and what they might need.

b. **Communication** – giving honest and clear information, and ideally face-to-face. One of the new challenges schools are experiencing is delivering news without being physically present with staff, parents and families. In these unprecedented times, this might include video or telephone contact. Thinking about how to manage this sensitively, with guidance on how parents can talk to their children and how they might access more support if they need to. Please see to our guide for parents on talking to children about death and dying for more information.

c. **Planning** – thinking about next steps; for example, how the school community can offer their condolences without being physically together, and planning with the family and school community any support they might need to feel, heal and grow forward.

d. **Follow-up** – thinking about how to follow-up with staff and families. You might offer 1:1 meetings with staff or check in as smaller groups. You may agree to call certain families, and provide information about how parents can contact if they have any concerns.

---

**6. The importance of empathy and compassion -**

while it might feel challenging, sharing sad and difficult news from the heart can make a huge difference to how others experience it. Acknowledging how sorry you are, how you imagine it might leave staff and families feeling, and how they can support themselves and each other, can enable communities to feel more connected and to cope, even in challenging times. Taking time to listen to how others are feeling, without judgement and provide timely updates can be containing and supportive.

**7. What further help is needed** - schools will already have a lot of skills and resources to enable them to share difficult news and support their communities, and there may be times when they want additional help. This might be from bereavement services that offer specialist help to schools, or speaking to the mental health, wellbeing and education professionals linked to their school, to think about support for staff, pupils and families. You might also become aware of staff members or families who continue to feel significant distress after some time and might want more help. We've included a list of charities and services that can offer support to schools and families, and signpost to further resources.

---

## **Support for schools**

[Enfield's Educational Psychology Service](#) provides a critical incident protocol, and offers telephone support to all settings experiencing critical incidents. You can request this support by calling 0208 379 2000, or emailing [eps-sews@enfield.gov.uk](mailto:eps-sews@enfield.gov.uk)

[Enfield's Specialist Nursing Play & Bereavement Service](#) offers support, resources and protocols to help schools respond to bereavements. You can request this support from Lisa Dodd on 07392 192 269 or [lisa.dodd4@nhs.net](mailto:lisa.dodd4@nhs.net)

## Further support for schools and families

### Enfield's specialist nursing bereavement service

Families can call or email Lisa Dodd on 07382 192 269 or [lisa.dodd4@nhs.net](mailto:lisa.dodd4@nhs.net)

Offers one to one work with children who been bereaved of a close family member or had a traumatic bereavement.

### Grief Encounter

<https://www.griefencounter.org.uk/>

Support for bereaved children and their families in North London.

### Winston's Wish

<https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Support for children and young people after the death of a parent or sibling.

### CRUSE

<https://www.cruse.org.uk>

Support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies.

### Child Bereavement UK

<https://childbereavementuk.org/>

Support for families when a child dies.

### KOOTH

<https://kooth.com/>

Online mental health service for young people aged 11 to 19 years.

---

## **Additional guidance to schools following bereavement**

### **Designated Persons**

There are key roles that should be assigned to members of staff when the policy is implemented.

- A Key Co-ordinator (usually the Head teacher) responsible for liaising with all parties.
  - The member of staff who knows the family best, who might be best placed to maintain ongoing contact with the family.
  - A member of staff, usually the Head or member of SLT, to act as a media spokesperson in the event one should be needed.
  - School administrative staff that have access to contact details, and can provide admin support.
-

## Steps to follow in the event of the death of a pupil, staff member or close relative of a pupil:



## Phone call guidelines

- Ensure you are speaking to the appropriate person when calling as numbers on record are not always correct.
  - Always use correct terminology: the person has 'died', not 'passed away' or 'been lost'.
  - Always use the deceased's name when referring to them. Make a note of it beforehand, as your mind can go blank under stress.
  - If the call is answered by a machine then do not leave any information, just leave contact details and ask that they get back to you.
  - Have on hand the signposting resources, should the families want any additional help.
-

**Funeral guidance from public health**

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an infectious disease and can be transmitted when large groups of people congregate. However, with certain precautions funerals should continue to take place.

To help reduce the risk of spreading the infection, funeral directors and faith leaders are advised to restrict the number of mourners who attend funerals, so a safe distance of at least 2 metres (3 steps) can be maintained between individuals. Only members of the deceased person's household or close family members should attend funerals. Any individual displaying symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend. Those who do attend will need to adhere to social distancing at all times, including when travelling to and from the funeral.

In addition, the guidance advises that since there is a small but real risk of transmission from the body of a deceased person, mourners are strongly advised not to take part in any rituals or practices that bring them into close contact with the body of a person who has died from or with symptoms of COVID-19. Practices that involve close personal contact with the deceased should only be carried out using the correct personal protective equipment (PPE).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-advice-for-safe-funerals-after-discussions-with-faith-leaders>

---



**ENFIELD**  
THRIVES TOGETHER



**Barnet, Enfield and Haringey**  
Mental Health NHS Trust



*A University Teaching Trust*

This resource has been developed by Enfield Thrives Together, an emerging virtual team of existing school-facing services to provide a focus on supporting the health and wellbeing of our school communities.