Supporting Children and Young People Following a Sad or Distressing Event

Guidance for meeting emotional needs and supporting recovery

Familiar and trusted adults who have an existing relationship with children and young people are often best placed to provide support following a sad or traumatic event. Their presence can provide **safety, reassurance, connection and continuity** at a time when things may feel uncertain.

Schools and settings should aim to maintain familiar routines and relationships wherever possible, while allowing flexibility according to individual needs. Children and young people should have opportunities to talk, ask questions or express themselves, **without feeling under pressure to discuss the event or their feelings**.

Helpful approaches include:

- **Be available and listen.** Let children know that trusted adults are available if they want to talk or ask questions.
- **Provide clear and honest information.** Use developmentally appropriate language and distinguish what is known from what remains uncertain.
- **Maintain familiar routines and boundaries.** Predictability can help children feel safe and contained, while allowing flexibility on more difficult days.
- **Acknowledge different responses.** Children may experience sadness, anger, anxiety, confusion, numbness or no obvious reaction. Responses can change over time.
- **Avoid rushing to reassure or "fix" feelings.** Listen, acknowledge the child's experience and provide calm reassurance where appropriate.
- **Offer choices.** Some children may want to talk, while others may prefer play, drawing, music, reading, physical activity or simply continuing with familiar activities.
- **Provide access to a quiet or familiar space** if a child needs time away from usual activities, while maintaining connection with trusted adults.
- **Support physical wellbeing.** Encourage normal patterns of eating, drinking, sleep, movement and everyday activity.

- **Be sensitive to culture, faith and family beliefs**, particularly in relation to death, grief, mourning and remembrance.
- **Notice children who may need additional support.** Consider those particularly connected to or affected by the incident and monitor their needs over time.
- **Work in partnership with parents and carers**, sharing appropriate information about how the child is coping and agreeing how best to support them.
- **Prepare for reminders.** Anniversaries, birthdays, funerals, memorials, media coverage or other events may bring renewed feelings or questions.
- **Seek additional advice where needed.** If difficulties are persistent, significant or affecting everyday functioning, consider consultation with the EPS or other appropriate services.

Children may ask apparently minor questions or repeat the same question several times. This can be part of trying to **understand what has happened, seek reassurance or reconnect with a trusted adult**. Respond calmly and consistently.