

Accessing Educational Psychological Support for Critical Incidents

1. Purpose

This protocol sets out the process by which schools and educational settings in Solihull can access Educational Psychology (SEPS) support in the event of a Critical Incident. The support from the Solihull EP Team is a non-traded bespoke service and available to all Solihull schools, regardless of their maintained status for one or two days. The timing of this support can be spread over several days or weeks, to suit the school community.

2. What is a Critical Incident?

A Critical Incident is any event, sudden and or unexpected, that has significant emotional power to overwhelm the usual coping mechanisms of a whole school or members of the school community. The event may be a single occurrence or a sequence of events. This may include:

- the sudden death of a member of staff, pupil or parent of a pupil
- an accident
- a criminal act including violent attack within or against the school or community
- fire at a school or in the local community
- a local natural disaster
- suicide or attempted suicide that affects members of the school community

3. Major Incidents

A Major Incident is defined as an event or situation impacting a school or wider community causing a range of serious consequences which requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responder agency. This may include major fires, significant natural disasters or terrorist attacks. These incidents will activate Solihull MBC Major Emergency Plan.

In the event of a Major Incident, the Solihull EP team has a reciprocal agreement with Coventry and Birmingham EP services that will enable each party to draw on the capacity of each service (ref West Midlands Principal Educational Psychologists Agreement).

4. SEPS Levels of Response

Level 1: Loss and Bereavement

This would not usually be considered to be a critical incident although in some cases school staff may request help from the SEPS team. Usually, school staff will draw on their own resources to support children, staff and families. In some cases, schools may wish to seek support from the SEPS team. This could include situations where multiple incidents of loss or bereavement over time impact an individual or the school community.

Level 2: Critical Incident

This term covers a range of possible events (see examples above). The defining element is that the event is traumatic and that it presents a challenge to a school's usual procedures and coping strategies. In these cases, educational settings should follow the protocol in section 5.

Level 3: Major incident

A large-scale incident which may affect schools and the wider community in more than one local area. Specialist involvement will be required and possibly co-ordination across regional educational psychology services and other services in the region (see section 3). In this case, the

SEPS team will contribute to the overall Council response via the Solihull MBC Major Emergency Plan as described above.

These incidents may require the activation of Solihull MBC Major Emergency Plan. In such cases the SEPS Team will sit help the Health & Welfare Cell to contribute the overall Council response.

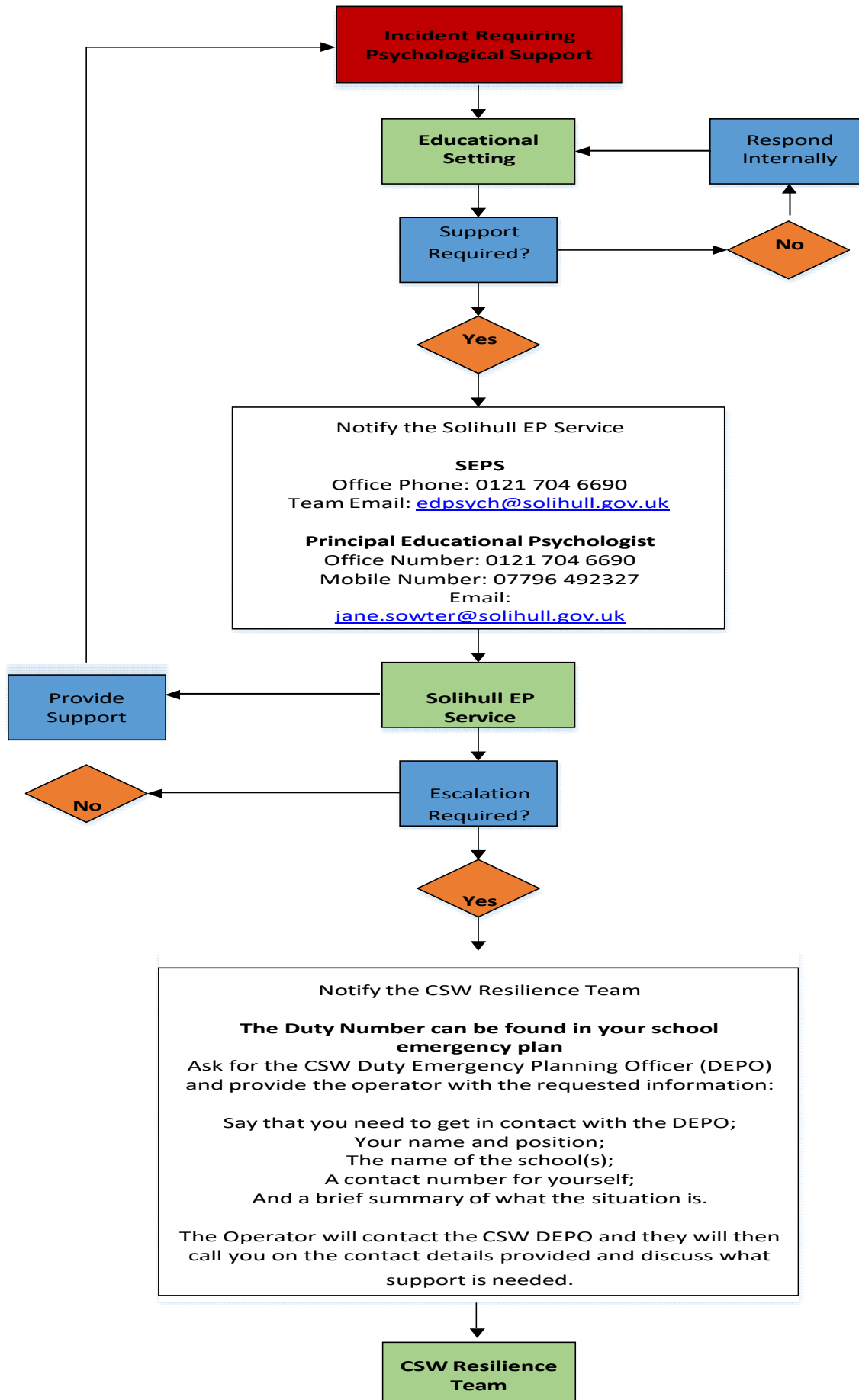
If colleagues have any questions regarding support for critical incidents or wish to seek support, they should not hesitate in contacting the SEPS team. We also offer training to Senior Leaders in schools on managing and planning for critical incidents.

The process for accessing support is found in the protocol below.

Office Tel: 0121 7046690

Out of Hours: 07796 492327

5. Procedure for a school requesting SEPS support in the event of a critical incident (*during business hours*)



6. Psychological principles underpinning the SEP response

- The best people to support children immediately after experiencing grief or trauma are the adults that they know and trust, for example, parents, carers and/or school staff. In these circumstances the primary role of external agencies, such as the Educational Psychology Service, should be to provide support for these adults. Only in exceptional cases would educational psychologists work directly with the children and young people.
- It is vital that the facts as they are known, at the time, are communicated, where appropriate, quickly and clearly to the whole community including parents and carers. (Unless advised otherwise by the police or government.)
- Children and young people need to be told information that might be distressing in small groups by adults that they trust. External agencies can provide support for these adults regarding the most appropriate way to achieve this and advise on ways to monitor reactions, in order to identify children and young people who may require additional support.
- Children and young people need opportunities to “tell their story”. Adults need to make themselves available to allow this to happen. However, children and young people should never be pressurised to talk. Some children and young people may find it easier to express their feelings in other formats, such as drawing or playing.
- Children who have witnessed an incident need to be encouraged to tell their story to an adult rather than to other children. Older pupils may choose to tell their friends who may also need to have the opportunity to talk to an adult.
- The usual routines and structures in schools provide security and need to be maintained. Where children and young people are too distressed to cope with their usual routines, they will need other supportive arrangements made for them.
- Children and young people need the opportunity to express the support that they may find helpful.
- Adults in schools need to provide information to help parents and carers to support their children. External agencies will be able to provide advice on how best to do so.
- Traumatic events can evoke past feelings of grief, loss and separation, so some members of the school community who have not been directly involved in the incident may still need additional support.
- Educational psychologists working with schools and the community who have experienced a traumatic incident will also need support through the supervision of this work.
- Depending on the scale of the incident, educational psychologists may work together within an EPS or across local authority teams provide support to schools and wider community (see section 4).
- It may be necessary to offer follow-up support to a school at a later date where there may be subsequent events related to the original incident for example, a court case following the incident.