



# Significant Incident Resource for Education Staff (18+)





## What to do when a significant incident happens that affects students and staff

We understand how tight-knit educational settings can be. When something serious or traumatic has happened so close to home, it can understandably have a huge impact on you and the students you support. We wanted to reach out to you today to let you know that you are not alone and to offer some support and advice during this difficult time.

### Understanding how different people respond and why

Changes to how you think, feel, and behave are totally natural responses to any traumatic event, however connected you feel to what happened. And, while everyone is different, here are just a few reasons why there might be strong reactions from those around you - whether that's the students you support, yourself, or your fellow colleagues.

- The incident itself might be particularly distressing.
- The relationship that people had with the people/person involved (for example, staff who have taught or supported a student involved in a significant incident might feel more affected, as might students who have been in the same lectures, seminars, or working groups as the person involved).
- It might be connected to a past trauma for certain people.
- The details of what happened may cause strong or complicated emotions, such as anger, fear, or distress.

## Understanding and acknowledging how people might be feeling

Everyone reacts differently to difficult news. This is totally natural. However, here are some of the emotions you might experience personally or observe from others in the coming days, weeks, and months:

**Sadness** - Where people might feel upset, tearful, and experience low mood.

**Loneliness** - Where people might feel alone with their emotions and feel like nobody understands what they're going through.

**Anger** - Where people feel angry at what has happened and question why. They might even feel angry towards other people, too, which may affect an educational setting both from a work perspective and also as a student environment (more on this below).

**Disbelief** - Where people can't quite believe what has happened, and it doesn't seem real.

**Numbness** - Where people aren't able to feel or connect with their emotions. Feeling numb is your brain's way of protecting you from tricky emotions and can be a very common feeling when something difficult happens.



Of course, the above are just examples. It's worth noting that, as we are all unique, there might also be a range of other feelings present, and that's okay. It's also important to remember that not everyone will experience difficult emotions - some people might not be affected, and that's okay, too.

You might also take notice of any changes to your students, colleagues, or staff (especially if you are part of the senior leadership team, a head of department, or have another managerial role or responsibility at work).

Some people might get quieter, others louder; some might want to fill their time, others might need to slow down. You might notice some people going out more or some who want to go out less. These are all possible responses to a difficult situation, no matter how subtle they might appear.

## How this might impact students and staff

Being affected by difficult situations can understandably impact other areas of life. In an educational setting, it can have an effect on concentration, focus, productivity, and the ability to manage work loads and difficult situations. This goes for staff as well as students.

## How can you help your students and colleagues right now?

When something difficult happens, it can be overwhelming, so we thought we'd share some ideas on how you can help both yourself and others.

**1 Be kind with yourself and others:** You might notice there are a whole range of different feelings and responses in the coming weeks, which can feel overwhelming as a member of staff, an educator, and as a human experiencing your own difficult emotions, too. Some of your students and colleagues might cope differently to others, so it can be helpful to be especially kind and patient.

### You can do this by:

- Asking how they are doing. Asking twice can be important to let someone know you really do want to listen to what they have to say, and doing so might encourage them to open up if that's what they need. Of course, it's also important to respect when people don't want to talk about their feelings with you, too.
- Listening to how they are feeling.
- Asking them if there is anything you can do to help them. (For staff: thinking together about workload, being temporarily flexible with working hours, agreeing to time off where possible. For students: thinking about workload, how you can support them, and being flexible with deadlines where possible).
- Sending a card, email, or a simple note to let them know you are thinking of them if what has happened has affected them personally.



**!** Please be mindful that, sometimes, flexibility and reducing workload isn't helpful for some people, especially if they like to have a task to focus on. Asking them what they need is a good place to start in figuring out what will work for them.

As a general approach you could also think about the following:

- **Recognising the emotions that people might have.** This can be as simple as saying, "It's completely natural for people to feel upset/sad/angry/distressed/ in disbelief right now."
- **Encouraging your students and colleagues to express their feelings.** This could be anything from having an open door policy for those who want to talk about how they feel or how they have been affected, having an extended drop-in counselling service at break times or after work for staff, or even arranging all-staff or all-student meetings for those who want to talk about what has happened, if that feels appropriate. If you have an onsite counsellor, student services, or a pastoral manager, you could liaise with them about possibilities in terms of support and staff training, too.

**!** It's important to note that you might feel a huge sense of responsibility for your students and colleagues, whether you have line management responsibilities or you are a supportive colleague. But don't forget about your own feelings, too. In an emergency flight situation, people are instructed to put on their oxygen mask first before they help anyone else. This is because you can't help others if you haven't got enough oxygen yourself. The same goes for other difficult situations. Taking care of yourself is so important, however you do it. You might want to cry or even shout, and that's okay if it's helpful for you. Alternatively, you might want to talk with somebody, write your feelings down, or even listen to music that helps express your emotions. Do what feels right for you.



- **Thinking about taking time out to relax and recharge.** This could be something you do for yourself if you need to, whether that's a walk during your lunch break instead of working through it or making sure you go home on time. Working in education can be highly pressured and time consuming, so do take those breaks!

If you are responsible for staff, this could be as simple as encouraging people to take time off if they need or want it and to not work past their working hours. These can be helpful reminders for people not to over-stretch themselves.

For students, encouraging them to take regular breaks rather than cramming or working into the night can be useful. You might even consider not setting too much additional work for a period of time, if that feels appropriate. If you notice your students are partying more than usual or isolating themselves from others suddenly, or doing anything that could potentially be harmful to them physically or emotionally - gently talking about the importance of taking care of ourselves physically and emotionally without shaming them can be useful too (for example: you might talk about self care in general terms rather than in response to a particular behaviour). Ultimately, you know your students best, so do what works for them and for you, too!

**2 Manage possible conflict sensitively:** Traumatic events can make us feel or behave in ways that we wouldn't normally. This can mean that we end up being unkind or acting differently with those around us. So, whether the conflict emerges between staff or students, it could help to acknowledge any possible conflict and explore difficult feelings as a result of what has happened in a resolution meeting (or individual meetings, if this is more appropriate) to increase understanding and support from others - whether the conflict involves staff or students.

**!** In addition to this, if you find yourself involved in conflict, talking to your line manager or employment union can be helpful to get support and guidance, too.

**3 Encourage your staff to reach out for professional support if they want to:** Whether it's something your students, colleagues, or yourself want to access - now or at any time in the future - it can be useful to know what is out there. Being affected by difficult news or situations is totally normal, and it could impact someone for days, weeks, or even months while they process what has happened. But, if someone doesn't seem to be managing after a longer period of time, professional support might be useful. Suggesting this might feel like a sensitive subject, and you might even feel concerned about saying or doing the wrong thing, but offering supportive information with genuine kindness and good intentions could really help in the long term.



Here are just some organisations you might want to look into.

### Qwell

A digital wellbeing platform (part of Kooth PLC) where you can access live support from a fantastic team of mental health professionals. It is also full of informative and sensitively written articles and resources about a huge range of topics. You can find out more by visiting **qwell.io**.

### Kooth

Part of the same group as the above and offers the same service to young people up to age 26 in many areas of the UK. You can find out more at **kooth.com**. Please note that Kooth has no referral system and no waiting lists, which means if a student needs support and Kooth is commissioned in their area, it's accessible whenever they need it. You can find out more at **kooth.com**.

### Samaritans

A leading mental health charity with 24/7 access to support. For more information, take a look at **samaritans.org**.

### Cruse

A national bereavement charity where you can access support and information about grief. You can find out more by visiting **cruse.org.uk**.

### Hope Again

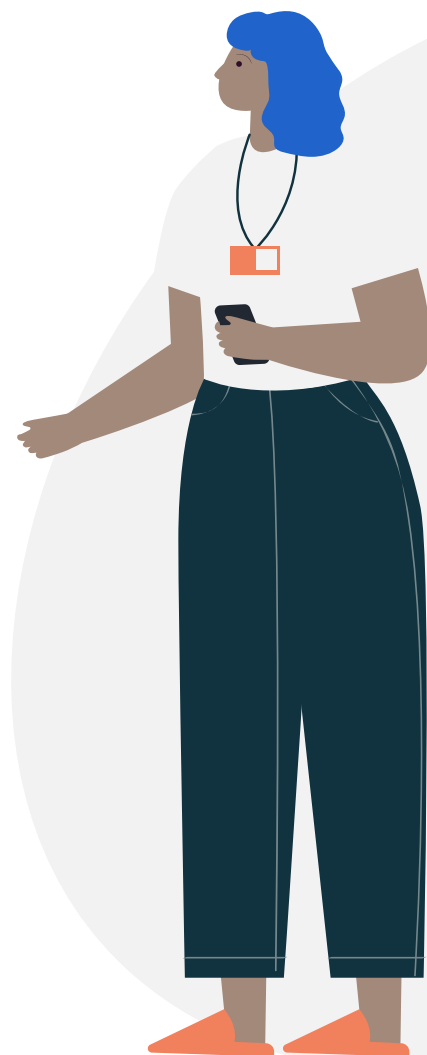
Cruse's sister site, specifically aimed at young people, which could be useful for students who are affected. Take a look at **hopeagain.org.uk**.

### Victim Support

An independent charity dedicated to supporting victims of crime and traumatic incidents in England and Wales. You can find out more at **victimsupport.org.uk**.

### Nightline

A student listening service that runs all over the UK. It is available when other on-campus student services are closed. To see if your place of education has a Nightline service, take a look at **nightline.ac.uk**.







If you, your students, or your colleagues are finding it difficult to cope with day-to-day living (affecting your ability to work or take part in normal, everyday activities), making an appointment with a GP can be a useful step to take. For those who are not registered with a GP, they can find one nearby by using the NHS search function at:

**[nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-GP](https://nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-GP)**

Navigating difficult situations like this can feel really tricky. Speaking to your own line managers, colleagues, or representatives from employment unions or similar groups for support can also be a useful tool should you need to discuss your own mental health or that of someone you're concerned about.

We realise that this letter does not change what has happened, but we hope you have found the information helpful.