

**“We Can Almost Run On Our Own”: School Staff Perspectives On The
Educational Psychology Service Response They Received Following A Critical
Incident**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology

Cardiff University

May 2025

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to my research supervisor, Dr Rosanna Stenner, for your ongoing support, kindness, and reflective discussions throughout my research journey. Thank you also to Dr Gemma Ellis who I started my research journey with and to my personal tutor Hayley Jeans for your ongoing support and containment over the past three years.

Thank you to all of the school senior leaders across England and Wales who participated in my research, it was a pleasure and privilege to hear your experiences. I hope from your contributions this research will make a positive impact in this area.

Thank you to Sheri Wright, my fieldwork supervisor for your invaluable guidance and support and for sparking my interest in critical incidents. Thank you for all your patience and containment whilst I balanced my Thesis and university requirements alongside my placement.

Thank you to my fellow TEPs for always being at the end of the phone and for being a continuous source of support and encouragement throughout the three years of the DEdPsy.

Thank you to Dave, Sonny, Missy, Mum, and Dad who have been my biggest cheerleaders throughout the past three years. Thank you for constantly believing in me and for your unconditional love. Dave, thank you for the endless supply of brews and

chocolate. Sonny and Missy thank you both for the best cuddles. I couldn't have done it without you.

Summary

This thesis is presented in three parts: a major literature review, an empirical research paper and a critical appraisal. It aims to explore school staff perspectives on the Educational Psychology (EP) Response they received following a Critical Incident (CI) and to identify how Educational Psychology Services (EPS) can further support schools following a CI.

Part One: Major Literature Review

This section is divided into two parts. Part One A presents a contextual narrative review which aims to explore the broader socio-political and theoretical context that frames the research on CIs. Part One B provides a semi-systematic narrative literature review focused specifically on the support provided by the EPS to schools in the UK following a CI. A clear rationale and research question (RQ) for the current study are presented.

Part Two: Major Empirical Paper

Part two provides an empirical paper beginning with a summary of the relevant literature, a rationale for the research and two RQs. The methodology is described in detail, including research design and ethical considerations. Themes and subthemes developed from the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2022), are presented and discussed in relation to the RQs, role of the EP and existing literature. The section concludes with implications for EP practice and wider systems, in addition to strengths and limitations of the study.

Part Three: Major Research Reflective Account

Part Three provides a critical appraisal of the research process and the study's contribution to the existing literature on CI response. It also provides a reflective and reflexive account of the development of both the researcher and the research, outlining key decisions made throughout the research journey and their implications.

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List of Abbreviations

AEP	Association Educational Psychologists
ALN	Additional Learning Needs
BPS	British Psychological Society
CASP	Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Checklist
CI	Critical Incident
CIRT	Critical Incident Response Team
CISD	Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
CYP	Children and Young People
DfE	Department for Education
ELSA	Emotional Literacy Support Assistant
EMHP	Education Mental Health Practitioner
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
GST	General Systems Theory
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
LA	Local Authority
MHST	Mental Health Support Team
MMAT	Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool
NAPEP	National Association Principal Educational Psychologists
NHS	National Health Service
OT	Occupational Therapist
PEP	Principal Educational Psychologist

PFA	Psychological First Aid
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
RQ	Research Question
SDT	Self Determination Theory
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
TA	Thematic Analysis
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
UK	United Kingdom
WG	Welsh Government



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Psychology Service Response they received following a Critical Incident**

Part One: Major Literature Review

Word Count: 14,182

Part One: Major Literature Review

1. Introduction

1.1. Thesis rationale

This thesis aims to explore school staff perspectives of the Educational Psychology Response they received following a Critical Incident (CI). The rationale for engaging in this research relates to two factors. Firstly, the researcher joined the CI team whilst working as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) in a Local Authority (LA) in England. During this time, the researcher observed a range of support provided to school communities following a CI which varied depending on the situation and the staff involved. This encouraged the researcher to reflect on the approach and support provided by the Educational Psychologist (EP) and whether this aligned with the needs and expectations of the school. Secondly there is limited research on school staffs' perspectives of the support they valued following a CI, with the majority of the literature focusing on EP perspectives (Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020).

1.2. Research Context

The research was conducted in Wales and England, where the researcher completed professional placements in both countries. These placements enabled direct engagement with local practices and fostered familiarity with the policy and guidance surrounding the role of EPs in supporting CIs. Conducting the research across both countries offered a valuable opportunity to explore a broader range of perspectives and

experiences related to CIs, grounded in a practical understanding of relevant policies. However, the semi-systematic narrative literature review incorporates sources from across the wider United Kingdom (UK) to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic and to capture broader viewpoints.

2. Part One A: Setting the Scene

2.1. Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to analyse existing literature relating to the role of the EP in supporting school staff and communities following a CI. The review is structured into two parts.

Part One A presents a contextual narrative review which aims to explore the broader socio-political and theoretical context that frames this research. This chapter begins by defining the term CI and briefly exploring the national context in which CIs occur within England and Wales, including relevant legislation and policy guidance. A narrative review was considered appropriate for this section due to its flexibility in synthesising literature across diverse academic disciplines and theoretical paradigms (Wong et al., 2013). This methodology is particularly valuable when exploring complex and multi-faceted topics such as CIs, which intersect with educational, psychological, and policy domains (Sukhera, 2022). This chapter also outlines the frameworks and support systems in place to assist school communities in responding to such events. To deepen understanding, psychological theories including Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Framework (2005), General Systems theory (GST) (Dowling & Osborne, 2001), and Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017) will be used to conceptualise the individual and systemic impact of CIs. The final section focuses on the role of the EP in responding to and supporting schools following a CI, with particular emphasis on psychosocial interventions and strategies to promote resilience and recovery.

Part One B presents a semi-systematic narrative literature review focused specifically on the role of the EP, aiming to address the literature review question: *What support is provided by the EPS to schools following a critical incident?* Semi-systematic reviews offer a structured yet flexible approach to reviewing literature, allowing for the identification of key themes, theoretical perspective and challenges related to EP involvement in CI support (Snyder, 2019). From a critical realist perspective, semi systematic narrative reviews are well suited to exploring issues such as CIs. They allow researchers to identify underlying and contextual factors whilst acknowledging the influence of both observable events and deeper social structures (Fletcher, 2017).

A range of search strategies were employed to identify relevant literature. These included the use of academic databases accessed via Cardiff University's online Library search, alongside a snowballing technique utilised in Part One A to enhance the breadth of the contextual narrative. The detailed methodology underpinning the semi-systematic search is outlined in the corresponding section of this review.

2.2. Definition of a Critical Incident

Within the literature, various terms are used to describe a CI including 'traumatic event', 'school crisis', 'crisis' and 'school emergency'. There is also considerable variation in definitions of CIs, however, there is general agreement that a CI is a sudden and unexpected incident which causes trauma to the school community and impacts the school system's ability to cope (Cabinet Office, 2013). Incidents that may affect schools

can include sudden death or injury to pupils or school staff, natural disasters, violence, accidents, or suicide (Beeke, 2013).

McCaffrey (2004) outlines a crisis as:

A situation which is outside the range of normal human experience, which would be markedly distressing to anyone, such as the death of a colleague (or colleagues), a child (or children); or a traumatic incident which resulted in a near death experience for a member (or members) of staff and/ or a child (or children) (p.110-111).

More recently, Beeke (2011) reviewed existing policy and literature to offer a more comprehensive definition of CIs, emphasising the capacity to disrupt entire school systems rather than solely impacting individuals. Furthermore, by using the term 'CI', already embedded within LA guidance and EP protocols, this definition resonates directly with EPs and school leaders (Blanchette, 2024; Dunne et al., 2022). In contrast, McCaffrey's (2004) use of the broader term 'crisis' is less aligned with the language used in schools and with EPs. Beeke's (2011) definition will be used throughout this paper and defines a CI as:

A sudden or unexpected event that has the potential to overwhelm the coping mechanisms of a whole school or members of the school community. A serious or significant event, it is likely to be outside the range of normal human

experience and would be markedly distressing to anyone in or directly involved with the school community (Beeke, 2011, p.13).

One uncertainty with Beeke's (2011) definition is the term 'unexpected event'. For instance, in specialist provisions supporting children and young people (CYP) with life-limiting conditions, a death may be both sudden and anticipated, yet schools may still require EPS support (Gallagher, 2024, as cited in Blanchette, 2024). This uncertainty around which unexpected events qualify as CIs may pose challenges in providing a consistent response across school contexts (Gallagher, 2024, as cited in Blanchette, 2024). How CIs are defined, and responses operationalised by LAs across England and Wales varies and will be the focus of the next section of this chapter.

2.3. Context in England and Wales

Under Part 1 of the Civil Contingencies Act (HM Government, 2004), LAs in England and Wales are legally required to put in place a range of measures that directly support schools prior to and after a CI. This includes assessing risks, developing and maintaining emergency plans and coordinating a multi-agency response (HM Government, 2004). Whilst the Act does not explicitly mention EPs, those working within LA EPS have become essential to meeting these duties by offering specialist guidance and practical support to school communities. As a result, responding to CIs has become a core aspect of EP professional practice, as reflected in longstanding research (Hayes & Fredrickson, 2008; Rees & Seaton, 2011).

Although the Civil Contingencies Act (HM Government, 2004), applies across the UK, the Welsh Government (WG) exercises its devolved powers to interpret and implement the Act within the specific context of Wales. As such, this next section will outline the separate guidance available to schools and EPs in England and Wales regarding CI response.

2.3.1. English Context

In England, the Department for Education (DfE, 2023a; DfE, 2024) has recently published updated guidance on preparing for and responding to CIs. The DfE (2023a) 'Emergency Planning and Response' guidance focuses on CIs involving death, serious injury or safeguarding concerns involving pupils or staff. In contrast, the DfE (2024) 'Protective Security and Preparedness' guidance addresses security related CIs including terror incidents and lockdowns.

Both documents encourage schools to develop an emergency plan and to establish strong working relationships with external agencies, such as emergency services and the LA. They also reinforce the importance of supporting CYPs wellbeing through preventative measures such as creating a safe and calm environment, early identification, early support, and access to specialist support needs (DfE, 2023a; DfE, 2024).

Whilst EPs are not specifically named as key responders to CIs, the ‘Emergency Planning and Response’ guidance (DfE, 2023a) refers to the EP role under the ‘Special Educational Needs Disabilities (SEND) and specialist settings’ section. EPs are identified as professionals who can support CYP with SEND through psychological interventions, particularly when there are changes in routine following a CI. The guidance also outlines the importance of multi-agency collaboration to ensure the CYP needs outlined in their Education Health and Care Plan are met (DfE, 2023a). A specific section on vulnerable CYP is also provided which states that vulnerable CYP should be prioritised for face-to-face support and provision during and following an emergency (DfE, 2023a). A vulnerable CYP is defined as someone who has been assessed under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, has an Education Health and Care Plan or has been identified as vulnerable by education providers or LA (DfE, 2023c). This might include young carers, care leavers or CYP in family circumstances that are challenging such as family mental health (DfE, 2023c).

Furthermore, the CI guidance (DfE, 2023a) reinforces the importance for schools to support CYPs mental health and wellbeing following a CI and references the ‘Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges’ guidance (DfE, 2021). This mental health guidance outlines the role of EPs in working collaboratively with education mental health practitioners (EMHPs) and contributing psychological input, such as Psychological First Aid (PFA). It also recommends that schools appoint a designated senior mental health lead to coordinate a whole school approach to wellbeing embedded across school policy, curriculum, pastoral support and staff

wellbeing (DfE, 2018; DfE, 2021). This approach enables improved collaboration between multi-agency teams such as EPs and National Health Service (NHS) mental health support teams (MHSTs) to promote mental health and wellbeing (Beeke, 2021).

In addition, the EPS Workforce Insights report DfE (2023b) briefly acknowledges the role of EPs in CI work, highlighting their contribution in supporting CYP, school staff and the wider school community.

2.3.2. Welsh Context

Similarly, Welsh Government (WG, 2025) has published updated guidance to help schools in Wales in preparing for and responding to CIs. This guidance encourages schools to lead their own emergency planning by having robust procedures in place and fostering collaborative relationships with external agencies such as the police and LA (WG, 2025). Within the section ‘Learners with disabilities, special educational needs (SEN) or additional learning needs (ALN)’, the guidance emphasises the need for schools to work collaboratively with the LA and families to support CYP with SEN or ALN receive personalised support (WG, 2025).

A section on ‘Vulnerable CYP’ identifies a non-exhaustive list of CYP who are vulnerable and will require differentiated approaches and targeted support following a CI. The following CYP are identified on the list: CYP with SEN/ ALN, minority ethnic groups with English or Welsh as an additional language, care experienced CYP, CYP educated outside of a school setting, CYP of refugees and asylum seekers, Gypsy,

Roma and Traveller CYP, CYP eligible for free school meals, young carers and CYP at risk of harm, abuse or neglect.

The guidance also refers to the statutory framework on 'Embedding a Whole-School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing' (WG, 2021). The framework not only reinforces the importance of schools taking a leading role in promoting mental health and wellbeing, but it also outlines the specific role of EPs. EPs are identified as key professionals in raising awareness of emotional wellbeing needs of CYP and staff, providing consultation, and psychological input as part of the multi-disciplinary response (WG, 2021). This role becomes particularly important following a CI when schools may need emotional support.

Furthermore, the Welsh focus on mental health and wellbeing is reflected in the development of the new curriculum, which places an emphasis on emotional literacy and health (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). The 'Educational Psychologists in Wales' report further reinforces the central role of EPs in responding to CIs (WG, 2016). It also highlights the EPs involvement in multi-agency approaches and providing a flexible approach to supporting the specific needs of the school communities (WG, 2016).

2.3.3. Relevance to the Educational Psychologist role

Whilst the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2017) Practice Guidelines do not explicitly refer to CIs, there are several principles outlined in the guidelines that are

relevant to the approach EPs can take when responding to CIs. The guidelines outline the importance of safeguarding CYP and addressing psychological distress which is particularly relevant following a CI (Section 1.1 & 4.1). EPs are expected to work collaboratively with school communities and multi-agency teams, a key element of recovery planning (Section 3.4 & 3.5). In addition, EPs are also required to apply psychological theory to promote wellbeing and whilst working systemically, both central to EP support following a CI (Section 1.2). EPs have a professional duty to work effectively with cultural and individual differences (Section 3.11 & 3.12). This is particularly important following a CI, where cultural beliefs and values significantly shape how grief, trauma and psychological support are understood and experienced. EPs are also professionally bound to engage in regular professional development and supervision which are both essential when managing the emotional demands of CI work and keeping up to date with mental health and trauma informed practice (Section 1.4 & 1.5).

Aligned with the above practice guidelines, EPs also operate within the standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists in the UK (HCPC, 2023). As registered professionals EPs are required to practice safely and ethically (Standards 1.1 & 1.3), communicate complex and sensitive information effectively and work collaboratively within multi agency contexts (Standards 7.1, 8.1, 8.3, 8.4). EPs are required to meet the needs of different groups and individuals and to adopt culturally sensitive, non-discriminatory practice (Standard 5.1). This is especially essential following a CI, to ensure that all members of the school community can access appropriate and

meaningful psychological support. EPs are also expected to apply relevant psychological theory such as trauma informed approaches to support affected school communities maintain professional competence through ongoing professional development and regular supervision (Standards 1.3, 10.4, 12.30, 12.32, 12.35). Trauma informed practice seeks to understand the impact of trauma on an individual's life, and it aims to empower individuals by reinforcing physical, psychological and emotional safety (Carter & Borrett, 2023). Treisman (2021) suggests trauma informed practice should consider the following four Rs: 'Realise' the impact of trauma and routes for recovery, 'Recognise' signs and symptoms of trauma, 'Resist' retraumatisation and 'Respond' by embedding knowledge of trauma into policies and practice.

The significance of the EP role in CI support is further reinforced by a recent publication by the General Secretary of the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) (Lowther, 2023). The article highlights the diverse nature of CIs, and the breadth of support EPs offer, often extending to the school and wider community (Lowther, 2023). Importantly, Lowther (2023) outlines the EP response to the Grenfell Tower fire, referring to findings from the Dunsmuir et al. (2018) report where 12 senior leadership team (SLT), six EPs and one LA officer took part in interviews. Findings from the interviews revealed that schools valued the immediate and personalised response from the EPS (Dunsmuir et al., 2018). Participants found the resources and scripted guidance supportive during a time of uncertainty (Dunsmuir et al., 2018). However, Lowther (2023) also argues that the important and emotionally demanding work of EPs

in response to CIs often remains overlooked and insufficiently recognised within wider professional discourse.

In summary, English and Welsh guidance encourages schools to lead the CI and mental health response and provide support for CYP by familiar and trusted adults to provide consistent emotional support (DfE, 2021; WG, 2021). EPs are uniquely positioned to provide support to schools following a CI due to their psychological knowledge, experience of trauma informed practice and systemic approach (BPS, 2017; HCPC, 2023; Lowther, 2023). Their ability to work collaboratively with multi agencies and to support mental health and well-being enables EPs to provide tailored, whole school support (BPS, 2017; HCPC, 2023). EPs commitment to regular supervision and professional learning also ensures their practice remains up to date and reflective (BPS, 2017; HCPC, 2023). The next chapter will explore the impact of CIs on school communities, CYP and staff wellbeing.

2.4. Impact of Critical Incidents on School Communities, CYP and Staff Wellbeing

In recent years, schools in England and Wales have experienced a wide array of CIs. This includes large scale CIs such as Grenfell Tower fire and the Manchester Arena bombings, in addition to smaller scale CIs such as the sudden death or suicide of a school staff member or pupil (Craigie et al., 2020). Irrespective of the scale or scope of the CI, all incidents can have a significant and far-reaching emotional impact on school communities and the wider school system (Lowe, 2010; Lowther et al., 2019; UK Trauma Council, 2023).

Beeke (2021) notes that trauma caused by a CI can have an overwhelming effect on the school community. CYP are at greater risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder and may experience difficulties with their social and emotional wellbeing (Costelloe et al., 2020). Symptoms may include intrusive thoughts, disturbing memories, and difficulties with sleeping in addition to experiencing grief and shock (Currie & Hayes, 2021). However, it is important to consider, that individuals will respond differently depending on personal experiences, beliefs, and the support available to them; all factors that will impact on their resilience and recovery (Currie & Hayes, 2021).

Whole school support is an important protective factor for staff and CYP following a CI (Donnelly & Rowling, 2007). Teachers are considered to be key figures in supporting CYP by providing emotional stability, trusted relationships and creating a sense of belonging following a CI (Balk et al., 2011; Dyregrov et al., 2013; Rowling, 2003). Re-establishing routines can also be important to provide a sense of normality (Baum et al., 2009; Dunne et al., 2022). Both the guidance from the DfE (2021) and the WG (2021; 2025) outlined in the previous section reinforce the importance for school staff to use supportive language, a caring approach and model resilience to promote recovery.

Holland and Wilkinson (2015) carried out research in two English counties, gathering perceptions from 75 school staff via questionnaires to explore how the schools coped, and what support they accessed following a CI focusing on bereavement. The research indicated that schools tended to adopt more reactive than proactive approaches to

managing CIs, although a proactive approach was deemed more effective (Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). Schools that adopt a proactive approach tend to have established CI policies in place and ensure that school staff have the sufficient skills and training to support the school community following a bereavement (Holland, 2016; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). Proactive schools often collaborate with specialist services such as bereavement organisations to access targeted resources and training (Holland, 2016; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015), that aligns with the 'Emergency planning and response' guidance (DfE, 2023a; WG, 2025). In contrast, reactive schools often focus on the support provided following the event and rely heavily on external agencies for support (Holland, 2016).

Despite schools becoming more familiar with trauma informed approaches (Trauma Informed Schools UK, 2023) and teachers often being the first line of emotional support for CYP, many teachers report feeling unprepared and unskilled to support with complex grief and trauma following a CI (Baweja et al., 2016 cited in Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024). It has been argued that this would be a key role for EPs in relation to supporting schools with the CI response (Hennessy, 2016). It also aligns with the HCPC (2023) standards of proficiency of applying psychological theory such as trauma informed approaches to support schools.

Supporting CYP whilst simultaneously managing their own emotional responses following a CI can place immense pressure on school staff, especially as they are part of the system that is affected by the CI (Greenway, 2005; Seyle et al., 2013). Research

has shown that schools can become overwhelmed by CIs, impacting on their ability to function as effective systems (Beeke, 2011). This can lead to dysfunctional systems within the school, impaired decision making, difficulties maintaining the day to day running of the school, all factors which can exacerbate the impact of the CI (Houghton, 1996). Whilst some schools may rush to refocus on teaching and learning, potentially neglecting the emotional needs of the school staff and CYP can lead to confusion and delayed emotional responses (Barclay, 2004). The school response to CIs can also impact on internal relationships and the trust and sense of security that has been previously developed (Lowe, 2010). Consequently, it is imperative that prompt and sensitive support is provided by school leadership and EP services to minimise the longer term effects of CIs on the school community (Aucott & Soni, 2016).

This reinforces the importance of viewing schools using a systems theory perspective to highlight the interconnected environments where CYP mental health and wellbeing cannot be viewed in isolation (Pellegrini, 2009). This aligns with the importance of adopting a holistic, whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing across the school community (DfE, 2021; WG, 2021). Systems theory is discussed further throughout the next section.

2.5. Psychological Frameworks applicable to the school system and school community

2.5.1. General Systems Theory (GST) (Dowling & Osborne, 2001)

A useful framework to explore the impact of a CI on the school system is the GST (Dowling & Osborne, 2001), as a CI can threaten the homeostasis and equilibrium of the school system. GST is a common approach used in EP practice to explore how different systems such as the school and family interact with one another (Pellegrini, 2009). If a school system is closed, it will resist change and struggle to engage with outside support and resources, consequently having a detrimental impact on the school community (Dowling & Osborne, 2001). In contrast, schools that operate as open systems are more adaptable to change, they are influenced by their environment following a CI and access external resources. However, even with an open system, self-generated change can still be difficult to manage (Dowling & Osborne, 2001). Consequently, schools will often seek support and advice from specialist services such as EPs following a CI to recognise how best to support their staff and children (Currie & Hayes, 2021). The role of the EP can be particularly beneficial with supporting the school following a CI as they are viewed as being independent from the school system whilst maintaining a positive relationship (Dowling & Osborne, 2001). This reinforces the importance of schools adopting a proactive approach to managing CIs by working collaboratively with external agencies rather than relying heavily on them for support (Holland, 2016; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015).

2.5.2. Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-Ecological Framework

Whilst GST provides a broad perspective on how different parts of a system interact, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological Framework complements this by focusing on

the relationships between environmental systems that may influence a child's development and recovery following a CI (see Figure 1). Through adopting an ecological approach, the CYP is placed at the centre of multiple concentric circles of support that can impact on their development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The framework is often used by EPs and reinforces that schools are well placed to provide support to CYP following a CI due to the existing relationships and reciprocal interactions that take place over time (Balk et al., 2011; Dyregrov et al., 2013; Rowling, 2003).

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) framework consists of five interconnected systems. The 'microsystem' is the child's immediate environment such as the family, school and community. They will often have the greatest impact on CYP particularly following a CI due to providing direct emotional support to the CYP (Feriver et al., 2020). The 'mesosystem' consists of the connections and relationships between those in the 'microsystem' for example the collaboration between the CYP family and their school. Following, a CI, it will be important there is strong communication and a joined-up response between the school and the family to ensure the CYP is sufficiently supported. The 'exosystem' consists of external systems which may indirectly impact on the CYP, such as the support of local government including EPs or health professionals that may work directly with the school. This level of support will be important to ensure schools receive the specialist support and knowledge. The 'macrosystem' considers the wider cultural context which indirectly influences the child, such as institutional systems, policies and attitudes relating to trauma informed practice and mental health. This will influence the internal support systems in place and their approach to supporting CYP

following the CI. Finally, the ‘chronosystem’ refers to the changes in experiences over time, this will include the CYPs experience and recovery following the CI.

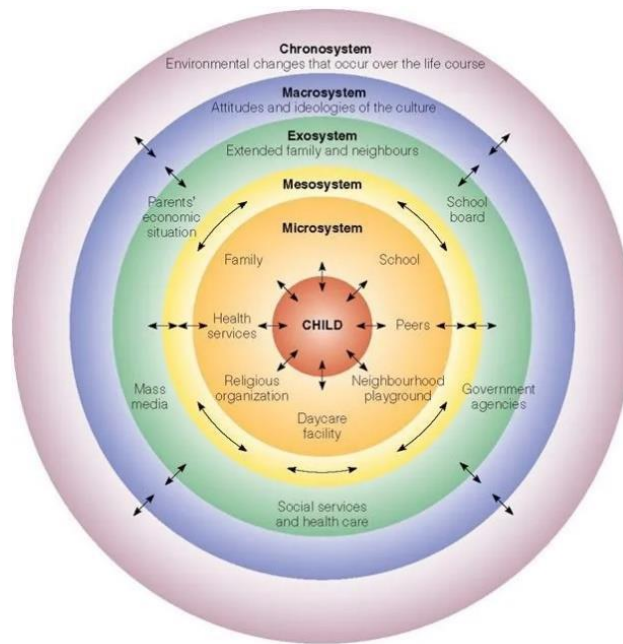


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological Model

School systems are capable of being an important support system for CYP following a CI, however the CI can cause organisational disruption and can impact on the ability of senior leaders to make effective decisions. Therefore, adopting a multi-systemic approach with co-ordinated support that facilitates recovery and resilience across each layer of the system is essential following a CI (Beeke, 2011).

Whilst Bronfenbrenner's (2005) framework emphasises the importance of support and nurturing relationships at the different levels of the school system, Self Determination

Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017) provides a complementary psychological lens that focuses specifically on the individual's psychological needs. This can provide an important approach for supporting school staff and SLT to recover and develop resilience following a CI. SDT is discussed further in the next section.

2.5.3. Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Self-determination theory (SDT) is defined as “a broad theory of human development and wellness, with strong implications for education” (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p.1). It places a strong emphasis on an individuals' intrinsic motivations for learning and development and how this can be effectively supported (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Whilst SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) has been explored within educational settings, particularly around learning and development and in mental health settings, its application to CIs has not been explored, to the authors knowledge. Despite this, SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) provides a valuable framework that EPs can use to support school staff and CYP following a CI. This is due to its focus on fulfilling three essential psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness that are essential for supporting healthy development and psychological wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Autonomy relates to a sense of choice and self-endorsement in a person's actions. Competence relates to a person's desire to engage effectively and achieve fulfilment through experiences of learning, skills acquisition and overcoming challenges. Relatedness reflects a person's desire for social connection and a sense of belonging (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

CIs can have a significant impact on the emotional wellbeing of the school community (Beeke, 2021), and therefore may impact on the school staff experiencing autonomy,

competence and relatedness. Ryan and Deci (2017) highlight that the environment is a central factor in supporting the needs being met and recommend adopting a need-supportive environment. This may involve actively listening, respecting a person's decisions and views, supporting with information and choice, encourage autonomy, provide gentle challenge and positive feedback and encouraging social interactions (Raeburn et al., 2024). Consequently, through promoting autonomy and competence, individuals will feel valued and empowered to take an active role in their recovery (Raeburn et al., 2024). In a CI context, EPs are well placed to facilitate recovery and wellbeing of school staff and leaders by adopting a need-supportive environment.

Further support for using an SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) approach is highlighted in Fawor et al.'s (2024) study, which explored the experiences of 34 occupational therapists (OTs) who reflected on using SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) approaches in mental health settings via open ended questionnaires. Data were analysed through Thematic Analysis (TA) and three themes were identified. The 'Working on myself' theme reflected OTs engaging in self-reflection and personal growth. The 'Self-development' theme reinforced OTs feeling empowered using the approach and adopting more strengths-based approaches in their practice. The third theme 'Working with the person' highlighted the opportunities for OTs to build relationships, engage in collaborative problem solving, and provide opportunities to challenge themselves. Consequently, the findings showed that adopting an SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) approach, supported the psychological needs of both the practitioner and the individual receiving the support (Fawor et al., 2024).

Although SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) has not been applied within a CI context, its application in both an education and mental health settings highlight the potential benefits for EPs. Through adopting an SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) informed approach as part of the CI response it would support the development and autonomy of school staff and leaders in responding to the needs of the school community (Beeke, 2021). Additionally, Ryan and Deci (2020) also highlight that adopting a SDT approach can promote both wellbeing and psychological growth.

To summarise, all three psychological frameworks provide important insights into how support can be provided at the different levels of the school system following a CI. GST (Dowling & Osborne, 2001) emphasises the importance of schools operating as open systems and accepting external support to work collaboratively following a CI. Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological Framework complements this by highlighting the interconnecting relationships and support at the different levels of the school system which impact on a child's development and recovery following a CI. Finally, SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) provides a supportive psychological lens that focuses specifically on the individual's psychological needs following a CI. This can provide an important approach for supporting school staff and SLT to recover and develop resilience following a CI.

2.6. The systemic role of the Educational Psychologist in CI response

EPs are uniquely positioned due to their established relationship working with schools, multi agencies and psychological knowledge, this makes them well placed in providing support to schools following a CI (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Beeke, 2011; Beeke, 2021; Bennett et al., 2021; Hayes & Frederickson, 2008; Lee & Woods, 2017; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Posada, 2006). Furthermore, EPs are experienced at working at different levels of the school system, supporting school leaders with practical and emotional support, whilst also helping school staff to support CYP (Fallon et al., 2010; Hennessy, 2016).

Research suggests the most effective approach to responding to trauma following a CI should centre on utilising the resources of the school community, supporting the staff who have existing relationships with CYP to continue to provide nurture and support (Holowenko, 2015). School staff at the 'microsystem' level of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) framework are most familiar with CYP and the school culture. Therefore, they are best placed to work individually with the CYP to prevent additional stress (Balk et al., 2011; Dyregrov, 2008; Dyregrov et al., 2013; Rowling, 2003). Whilst EPs may sometimes work directly with children following a CI, they will mostly support the system around the child within the school community. Examples could include working with school leaders, teachers, and families by recommending the use of support networks and natural coping strategies to develop resilience (Currie & Hayes, 2021; Slawinski, 2006).

Furthermore, whilst school staff are prioritising the needs of the CYP, it can often inhibit their own individual emotions, negatively impacting their own wellbeing (Hayes &

Gaukroger, 2024). Therefore, an important role of the EP is to support senior leaders with ensuring staff have the skills and support to cope and remain resilient following the CI (Cole et al., 2013). The support provided by EPs to school leaders may include providing guidance on short- and long-term responses, advising on CYP who may be at risk or more vulnerable and providing psycho educational support to normalise feelings of grief (Currie & Hayes, 2021; Dunsmuir, 2018). EPs will be able to support schools with CYP who are vulnerable or at risk following a CI by working collaboratively to ensure differentiated approaches and targeted support and provision are provided (DfE, 2023a; WG, 2025).

Research also reinforces the importance of adopting a coordinated systemic approach when providing support to school communities (Beeke, 2021; Lockhart & Woods, 2017). Support for schools following a CI is often coordinated by a Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT), this consists of a team of EPs working with other professionals such as mental health professionals, specialist teachers and senior leaders to provide short term support to the school (Beeke, 2021). For mass critical events a CIRT may also include police and social workers (Beeke, 2021). It is suggested that best practice follows a fully co-ordinated psychological response with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, empowering school leaders to take ownership of the response with the support of EPs and other professionals (Dunne, 2021; NICE, 2018).

EPs have an important role in empowering and supporting school leaders to implement a trauma-informed and proactive response following a CI. They can support this by

encouraging autonomy, providing emotional safety, and supporting leaders to draw on existing strengths to develop effective coping strategies, thus supporting long term resilience (Raeburn et al., 2024). As part of their systemic approach, EPs often use psycho-social interventions as part of their practice to support the needs of staff and CYP (Beeke, 2021), these approaches are explored further in the next section.

2.6.1. Psycho-social Interventions to support with a CI

CIIs are complex situations and EPs are able to provide a unique contribution due to their in-depth knowledge of psychological theory and of education systems (Cameron, 2006; Lockhart & Wood, 2017). Cameron (2006) argues that EPs have two distinct qualities that make them well placed to support schools and LAs in responding to CIIs. Firstly, they can apply psychological research and theory to provide evidence-based strategies and secondly, promoting innovations underpinned by psychological research to enable positive change. Literature from Beeke (2021) outlined three approaches that EPs can adopt when supporting CIIs, including Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) (Mitchell, 2003), Psychological first aid (PFA) (Brymer et al., 2006) and Consultation-based intervention (Wagner, 2000). A detailed discussion of these approaches will be provided below.

2.6.1.1. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

CISD is a structured psychoeducational intervention which consists of a group sharing their individual experiences during a one-off session following a CI (Mitchell, 2003). The approach aims to reduce stress and long-term psychological effects such as Post

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). CISD has become a common approach to use by EPS', with a survey across six LAs in England showing half of the 39 EPs surveyed used the approach with a school community following a CI (Beeke, 2011, 2013). However, systematic reviews have shown little evidence to support the efficacy of one-off debriefing sessions and propose they could even be harmful due to the risk of secondary trauma, also known as vicarious trauma (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Conlon et al., 1999; Hawker & Hawker, 2015; Rose et al., 2002; Wei et al., 2010). Rick and Briner (2004) argue that secondary trauma can occur when staff and senior leaders are re-exposed to the event due to discussing the facts, thoughts and feelings in relation to the CI. A further critique of the approach has also identified concerns that CISD was developed as an intervention to support emergency services, and not staff, therefore suggesting there is limited evidence to support its efficacy when used by EPs with school staff (Aucott & Soni, 2016). Consequently, the UK's National Institute for Clinical Health Excellence (NICE, 2018) advised against the approach over concerns it may prevent staff or CYP from having access to more effective evidence-based interventions.

2.6.1.2. Psychological First Aid

PFA is an evidence informed approach to support CYP and adults immediately following a CI (Brymer et al., 2006). It is described as a non-intrusive, calm, and compassionate approach which aims to provide practical and emotional support to reduce initial distress (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Brymer et al., 2006; Currie & Hayes, 2021). PFA uses a strength-

based approach to empower CYP or adults to take an active role in developing long and short-term coping strategies and developing resilience following a CI (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Brymer et al., 2006; Currie & Hayes, 2021). Thus, minimising the risk of experiencing negative outcomes such as PTSD (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Litz, 2008).

Brymer et al. (2006) outlines the 'eight core actions' of PFA which include contact and engagement, providing safety and comfort, providing stabilisation, information gathering of current needs and concerns, practical assistance, connection with social supports, information on coping and linking with collaborative services. Although two studies critique the limited empirical research and evidence to support the effectiveness of PFA, they found indirect evidence which aligns with using a trauma informed approach (Bisson & Lewis, 2009; Fox et al., 2012). Therefore, PFA is considered to be evidence consistent rather than an evidence-based model and is recognised as an acceptable response to CIs (Fox et al., 2012; Watson, 2007). It is also recognised as a more appropriate approach for EPs to use with schools following a CI than CIsD due to its supportive and non-intrusive nature and emphasis on natural coping strategies (Aucott & Soni, 2016). However further evaluation is recommended to develop stronger evidence for the approach (Aucott & Soni, 2016).

In summary, both CIsD and PFA are psychosocial interventions aimed at reducing emotional distress and mitigating the long-term psychological impacts of a CI (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Brymer et al., 2006; Litz, 2008; Mitchell, 2003). However, they differ significantly in their approach and suitability for different populations.

CISD is a structured, one-off group intervention developed for emergency service staff who are indirectly affected by the CI. It involves participants recounting their thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the CI (Mitchell, 2003). CISD has been criticised for its potential to cause re-traumatisation and secondary trauma, with limited evidence supporting its effectiveness in school settings (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Conlon et al., 1999; Hawker & Hawker, 2015; Rick & Briner, 2004; Rose et al., 2002; Wei et al., 2010). As a result, NICE (2018) advises against its use in educational contexts. CISD may be more appropriate for homogenous emergency service teams, such as police or paramedics, who have responded to a CI (Mitchell, 2009). In these cases, shared experience and structured reflection, facilitated by a trained professional, can make group debriefing more relevant and potentially beneficial (Mitchell, 2009).

In contrast, PFA is a flexible, non-intrusive intervention suitable for anyone emotionally affected by a CI, including school staff and CYP (Aucott & Soni, 2016). It supports natural recovery by providing practical and emotional support without requiring individuals to discuss the incident in detail or share personal feelings (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Currie & Hayes, 2021). PFA is evidence-consistent, aligns with trauma-informed principles and is therefore considered more appropriate for educational settings (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Bisson & Lewis, 2009; Fox et al., 2012; Watson, 2007). For example, EPs may offer school staff a calm space for emotional containment and provide guidance on typical trauma responses to normalise grief (Aucott & Soni, 2016). They may also help to support school leaders in connecting with bereavement charities or local services to assist staff and CYP with coping strategies (Beeke, 2024).

2.6.1.3. Consultation

Over the past three decades EPS in the UK have increasingly adopted consultation as a core model of practice, with some EPS, using consultation as their preferred model of service delivery (Larney, 2003; Leadbetter, 2006; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). Beeke's (2011) study which explored different aspects of EP practice in response to CIs, found the majority of EPs use a consultation approach when supporting schools following a CI. Wagner's (2000) widely used definition of consultation emphasises that consultation is, "a voluntary, collaborative, non-supervisory approach, established to aid the functioning of a system and it's interrelated systems" (p.11). This definition grounded in Wagner's (1995) model of consultation reflects a move away from the traditional expert model towards a collaborative and proactive approach to working with schools.

Adopting a consultation approach following a CI can build capacity by empowering school leaders and staff to support their school community (McCaffrey, 2004). It can allow for EPs to support school leaders with identifying needs, formulate coordinated action plans with other professionals and evaluate the effectiveness of the plans (Beeke, 2021). As such, consultation has now become one of the main ways of practising as an EP in the UK (Fallon et al., 2010; Jones & Atkinson, 2021)

To guide support following a CI, Beeke (2021) proposes the COPE consultation framework which incorporates Hobfoll et al.'s (2007) five elements of promoting safety, calming, self-efficacy, connectedness, and hope. Through this framework, EPs can support the school to re-establish relationships with CYP, apply strategies to reduce

anxiety, strengthen supportive networks and implement approaches based on positive psychology (Tedeschi et al., 2018).

This approach utilises EPs existing consultation skills to ask questions and clarify concerns, such as suitable communication with CYP or parents (Beeke, 2021).

However, similar to the findings on PFA, there is very limited research evaluating the effectiveness of consultation to support with CIs, due to the sensitive nature of the work (Beeke, 2011).

To conclude, EPs, have an important role in working systemically with schools following a CI through drawing on their established relationships with schools, multi-agency networks and psychological knowledge (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Beeke, 2011; Beeke, 2021; Bennett et al., 2021; Hayes & Frederickson, 2008; Lee & Woods, 2017; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Posada, 2006). Research suggests that whilst EPs sometimes work directly with staff and CYP, they are best placed to empower and support senior leaders with utilising existing strengths, developing coping strategies and developing resiliency within the school (Currie & Hayes, 2021; Slawinski, 2006). In addition, school staff are recognised as being best placed to provide support and nurture to CYP due to their existing relationships (Holowenko, 2015). EPs often use psychosocial interventions such as PFA (Brymer et al., 2006) and Consultation-based intervention (Wagner, 2000) to provide a collaborative, supportive and compassionate approach (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Currie & Hayes, 2021; Wagner, 2000).

2.7. Part One A: Chapter Summary

In summary, guidance from English policy (DfE, 2021; 2023a; 2024) and Welsh policy (WG, 2021; 2025) reinforces the importance of schools leading the CI and mental health response through a whole school approach, whilst also providing direct support for CYP by trusted adults. This approach is underpinned by the application of various psychological frameworks to develop a deeper understanding. GST (Dowling & Osbourne, 2001) emphasises the importance of schools functioning as open systems receptive to external support following a CI. Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological Framework complements this by focusing on the relationships between interconnecting systems, whilst SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) can provide a useful approach to supporting staff and SLT.

EPs are uniquely positioned to support schools response to a CI due to their psychological knowledge, trauma informed practice experience and systemic approach (BPS, 2017; HCPC, 2023; Lowther, 2023). The literature highlights the importance of EPs working systemically to empower and support senior leaders through utilising their strengths and developing strategies and resiliency with the school (Holowenko, 2015). Whilst EPs sometimes work directly with CYP and staff, working with senior leaders using consultation and PFA approaches are increasingly being used to provide collaboration, support and promote resilience (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Currie & Hayes, 2021; Wagner, 2000).

Part A drew on the broader socio-political and theoretical contexts incorporating research from different sectors such as the health sector and education sector drawing on both position papers and empirical research. Part B aims to focus more specifically on the role of the EP, drawing on empirical research within the UK, aiming to address the following question: *What support is provided by the EPS to schools following a CI?*

3: Part One B: Semi-Systematic Narrative Literature review

3.1. Overview

A semi-systematic narrative literature review (Snyder, 2019) was carried out to explore the question: **What support is provided by Educational Psychology Services to schools following a critical incident (CI)?** This approach is well suited to identify themes, different theoretical perspectives, and challenges in relation to EP's supporting schools following a CI (Snyder, 2019). It also makes links between studies on different topics to develop new ideas (Siddaway et al., 2019). Consequently, this approach is congruent with the authors' ontological stance of Critical Realism which seeks an objective reality whilst recognising that meaning is subjectively constructed by experience (Crotty, 1998).

3.2. Search Terms and Sources

A semi systematic search was conducted using the following electronic databases: PsychINFO, Applied Social Science Index, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis. The databases were chosen due to their focus within the Social Sciences, Education and Psychology, enabling access to literature relevant to Educational Psychology. In addition, further research articles were also identified using a snowball technique through scanning reference lists in existing search papers (Cresswell & Creswell, 2018). The searches were carried out between September 2024 and January 2025. The search terms for all databases were "critical incident*" OR "traumatic event" OR "major incident" OR "school crisis" OR

"bereavement support" OR "school emergency" OR "crisis response" AND "School staff" OR "School" OR "Teacher*" AND "Educational Psycholog*" (See Appendix 1).

3.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The gathered literature was reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria (See Table 1) to check its relevance for the study. Unpublished dissertations were included in the review as research findings show they are not subject to publication review bias and therefore they merit inclusion in literature reviews (Moyer et al., 2010).

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Semi Systematic Literature review

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
<p>Studies were included that were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published within 10 years (2014 onwards). • Conducted in the UK. • Empirical Studies. • Research published in an academic journal or unpublished doctoral thesis. • Articles were included if they focused on the role of the EP in supporting the school following a CI, bereavement or traumatic event. 	<p>Studies were excluded that were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published over 10 years ago (before 2014). • Conducted outside the UK. • Position papers. • Research not published in an academic journal. • Articles were not included if they did not focus on the role of the EP or the support they provide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To focus on more current practices of the EP role. • Due to variations in policies and legislation. • To be able to explore themes using verifiable data. • To ensure the quality of the studies. • To focus on the aim of exploring the role of the EP in supporting schools following a CI.

3.4. Transparency and Reporting

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model (Page et al., 2021) was used to ensure transparency in the literature search process, including the screening and eligibility of studies to be included in the literature review (Appendix 2). A total of 34 studies were retrieved from the semi-systematic literature search and 12 studies were included in this review (Appendix 4). Eight studies used qualitative methods, and four studies used mixed methods. The papers mostly involved school staff and EPs as the participants, however other professionals such as school counsellors and clinical psychologists were also included in some of the research.

3.5. Quality Appraisal

The twelve studies that met the inclusion criteria were examined for quality (Appendix 3). The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) (Singh, 2013) checklist was used to examine the eight qualitative studies and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018) was used to examine the four mixed methods studies. All twelve articles were included in the review.

3.6. Critical Review

3.6.1. Introduction

The semi-systematic narrative review explores the support provided by EPs to schools following a CI. Twelve studies were reviewed for patterns, and common themes were identified as subheadings throughout the review. Six of the studies focused on EP perspectives, five studies focused on school staff perspectives and one study, Silver (2014) focused on multiple perspectives including EP, school staff and school counsellors. The findings are organised into two parts:

Part one presents themes from the EP perspective, including the 'EP approach to supporting school staff', 'Collaboration and multiagency working', 'Written guidelines and communication', and 'Training and resources to support EPs with the CI response'. Part two focuses on school staff perspectives, with themes of 'Emotional containment', 'Supporting with supervision', 'Pastoral support' and 'Resilience and post traumatic growth'.

3.6.2. Ambiguity surrounding the role of the EP in CI

The importance of the EP role supporting schools following a CI has been discussed throughout the 12 studies, with research showing that 97% of EPs support school communities following a CI (Hindley, 2015). However, research findings from both the perspectives of EP participants and school staff reflects the uncertainty of the EP role, due to there being no clear definition or shared understanding of the support they

provide following a CI (Blanchette, 2024; Morgan, 2020; Prestidge, 2022; Silver, 2014).

It has been noted that the ambiguity could cause school staff to feel confused about what support is available and risk school communities not receiving timely or appropriate support (Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020; Silver, 2014).

Furthermore, the subjectiveness around what constitutes a CI could also cause challenges for schools and EPs and different perspectives may influence if support can and should be provided (Prestidge, 2022). It has been suggested that it should be needs led and therefore the support and containment provided should be driven by the schools needs (Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Prestidge, 2022). This approach aligns with Beeke's (2011) definition of a CI provided in this paper, which states a CI is:

A sudden or unexpected event that has the potential to overwhelm the coping mechanisms of a whole school or members of the school community. A serious or significant event, it is likely to be outside the range of normal human experience and would be markedly distressing to anyone in or directly involved with the school community (p.13).

Despite there being no defined role, a consistent theme across the review articles is the breadth of support EPs provide to the school community following a CI across three levels: systemic, group and individual levels following a CI (Blanchette, 2024; Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2014; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). This aligns with the

established way EPs work with school communities (Fallon et al., 2010). EP involvement following a CI has the potential to not only provide containment but to support systemic change, this will be especially important where some systems are working less effectively (Prestidge, 2022).

3.6.3. Key themes from EP participants

This section outlines the key themes from the literature review based on EP participants perspectives. The themes include the 'EP approach to supporting school staff', 'Collaboration and multiagency working', 'Written guidelines and communication', and 'Training and resources to support EPs with the CI response'.

3.6.3.1. The EP approach to supporting school staff

In a study exploring the responses of three organisations to a CI involving a suicide, semi-structured group interviews took place with 21 participants (school counsellors, EPs, and school staff) (Silver, 2014). Research findings indicated that the unique role of the EP in responding to a CI is the application of psychological theory and principles to gain a greater understanding of the situation from different perspectives (Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). Managing systemic change through collaboration with senior leaders was also considered an important and unique part of the EP role following a CI (Silver, 2014).

Participants also highlighted the importance of adopting a consultation approach through facilitating reflection, gathering information, identifying staff concerns, and

empowering school staff to explore ways forward (Silver, 2014). Adopting a systemic approach using consultation enabled school leaders to take ownership of the CI response, whilst EPs supported the school community's recovery process (Dunne, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Silver, 2014). EPs found having an initial consultation over the phone was important to provide time to reflect and gauge the level of need and support required before responding to a request for EP involvement (Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Wood, 2017; Silver, 2014). Whilst the study was limited to one LA in Wales and explored three professions rather than just the EP role, the benefits of using a consultative and systemic approach remain consistent with other research findings (Beeke, 2021; Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017).

A further study reviewed how EPs support schools following a suicide, findings showed that the most common form of support provided by EPs was face to face consultation and guidance on appropriate language (Brennan, 2021). Similar to the previous study (Silver, 2014), EPs reported working directly with senior leaders to provide a strategic response, identify CYP requiring support and to plan interventions (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015). Using a consultation approach, one of the EPs core ways of working, empowered schools through collaborative problem solving and drawing upon psychological principles (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014).

The unpredictable nature of the CI can lead to school staff feeling inexperienced and unprepared due to not feeling like they have the sufficient skills to support with a CI

(Blanchette, 2024). Therefore, combining consultation with guidance such as example scripts and language can develop a collaborative, problem solving environment that empowers school staff to make their own decisions (Prestidge, 2022; Silver, 2014). Thus, providing them with reassurance whilst also developing their confidence and skills to make decisions and lead the support the wider school community and CYP following the CI (Hindley, 2015; Prestidge, 2022; Silver, 2014).

Whilst most EPs in the studies reviewed, reported working at a systemic level, some research showed that EPs also carried out individual or group work with staff or CYP following a CI, if required (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). Some EPs described previously using debriefing approaches to support staff or CYP but shared a move towards using psychoeducation approaches to prevent duplicating the support of other services and to support with emotional and psychological containment (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017). This aligns with the advice from NICE (2018) to use alternative evidence-based interventions.

Brennan's (2021) study used a mixed methods design to explore how EPs support schools following a suicide. A survey was carried out with 76 EPs and five EPs were interviewed using a grounded theory approach (Brennan, 2021). Research findings showed that by using a systemic approach, EPs worked with senior leaders to provide containment for them, enabling senior leaders to support the wider school community (Brennan, 2021). In this study EPs highlighted the need to receive containment

themselves from the LA, in order to manage the CI and provide containment to the school community, thus, reinforcing the reciprocal nature of containment (Brennan, 2021). This also reinforces the benefits of coworking with another EP to provide regular supervision and support (Brennan, 2021; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Prestidge, 2022). Whilst the research emphasises the importance of EPs adopting both systemic and consultation-based approaches, the next section explores the benefits of multi-agency working and collaboration.

3.6.3.2. Collaboration and multi-agency working in responding to CIs

The benefits of working in a multi-agency team with other professionals has been highlighted in most of the research papers that interviewed EPs (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Prestidge, 2022; Silver, 2014). Findings showed that EPs preferred to work collaboratively when responding to a CI, noting that links with mental health professionals can help to support early identification, assessment, and intervention (Silver, 2014). Furthermore, a joined up and collaborative approach, provides increased awareness of other professionals' roles to prevent duplication of support (Brennan, 2021; Silver, 2014). Thus, providing psychological containment for the school due to the robust range of support around them (Brennan, 2021).

In a study exploring the development of CIRTs, 16 participants, 14 of which were EPs from seven LAs, took part in semi-structured interviews with findings analysed through content analysis and thematic analysis (Lockhart & Woods, 2017). In their findings, one of their three key themes focused on 'people'. Participants valued being part of a

multiagency team to build positive relationships with wider teams and to share expertise across different disciplines (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). Enabling a greater breadth of knowledge, skills and perspectives and providing the opportunity for referrals to be made to other agencies (Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). Whether a multi-agency response is needed, and which services are best placed to support requires consideration by senior management from within the LA (Lockhart & Woods, 2017). However, the ambiguity surrounding the role of the EP in CI response could cause additional challenges and overlap of roles (Prestidge, 2022; Silver, 2014).

Despite the benefits of being in a CIRT team discussed above, some participants reported a lack of confidence and support in the system in addition to the perceived challenging nature of the work and time commitment which led to some EPs not wanting to be part of the team (Lockhart & Woods, 2017). It was recognised that working as a multiagency team takes time and coordination and having too many professionals involved at once can complicate the response, especially if there is confusion over roles (Lockhart & Woods, 2017).

The challenges of working in a multi-agency team were also identified in Prestidge's (2022) study which explored three EPs experiences of responding to CIs. Participants shared that involving multiple professionals could give the impression that the incident was more severe, it could also be more time-consuming and more emotionally intense due to coordinating the different roles (Prestidge, 2022). This highlights the importance of LA senior managers coordinating which professionals are best placed to provide

support, in addition to initial phone conversations between schools and the CIRT team to ensure clear communication and pre-response planning to prevent professionals attending unnecessarily (Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). EPs also highlighted the benefits of coworking with another EP and considered it to be essential to provide an opportunity for a form of supervision and mutual debriefing (Brennan, 2021; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Prestidge, 2022). Whilst this section highlights the importance of multi-agency collaboration and support networks, the following section focuses specifically on written guidance and effective communication in supporting a CI response.

3.6.3.3. Written Guidelines and Communication

Hindley (2015) used a mixed methods exploratory approach consisting of two phases; an initial content analysis of written guidelines for responding to CIs from 30 LAs, followed by semi structured interviews with eight EPs. Findings showed that the majority (83%) of EPS' in England and Wales provide some level of written guidance for schools including support with grief and bereavement (Hindley, 2015; Silver, 2014). The aim of the guidelines is to provide a consistent approach to CI, however research findings showed they are not always kept up to date in light of organisational changes and current research evidence (Dunne, 2021; Hindley, 2015). Whilst EPs are not specifically mentioned in English or Welsh Government policies on CIs, schools are expected to have emergency plans in place and the LA are legally required to support schools with developing and maintaining these plans (DfE, 2023a; DfE, 2024b; HM Government, 2004; WG, 2025).

Although there was variation on the level of detail, most guidance documents provided support for schools with maintaining normal routines, briefing staff, informing students, identifying vulnerable CYP and signposting to additional support (Hindley, 2015).

However, it is also considered important not to have rigid protocols enabling a flexible approach to support the needs of the school community (Prestidge, 2022). In

Prestidge's (2022) research exploring EPs experiences to CIs, EPs shared the challenge of working between two systems: EPS and the school. They sometimes felt in conflict between following the EPS guidelines whilst also responding to the needs of the school and maintaining the relationship, resulting in crossing the boundaries set by the service (Prestidge, 2022).

In addition to written guidance, EPs also highlighted the importance of supporting with effective communication to the school community such as providing scripts, letter templates and proofreading letters for schools (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Silver, 2014). Supporting staff with the language to use was also considered extremely important by providing reassurance and aligns with Hobfoll et al.'s (2007) five elements of support outlined in part one (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017). EPs are considered to be well placed to support with effective communication due to their psychological knowledge and understanding of school systems (Lockhart & Woods, 2017).

Hindley's (2015) research which explored current practice of CI guidelines, showed that most EPs encouraged schools to become familiar with the CI process prior to a CI occurring. However, due to time constraints and avoidance of discussing the distressing topic of CIs, many schools appeared to be unprepared (Hindley, 2015). Nevertheless, the study findings are limited to EP views, therefore it is uncertain if school staff found the guidelines produced by the EPS beneficial and their reasons for not using them to prepare for a CI. It was also noted that although written guidance provides a framework it is not intended to replace tailored support and guidance from the EP (Hindley, 2015; Prestidge, 2022). Direct support for senior leaders is important to provide emotional safety, to empower school staff to support CYP and to normalise responses (Prestidge, 2022). Consequently, even with preparation, EPs may still be required to support school staff with decision making and collaboratively guide them through the process due to their high level of emotional needs (Hindley, 2015). This is due to the nature of a CI which has the potential to overwhelm the school system and its ability to cope, as outlined by Beeke's (2011) definition of CIs.

3.6.3.4. Training and resources to support EPs with the CI response

A final theme highlighted in the literature focusing on EP perspectives related to the training EPs receive in preparation for responding to CIs. In Prestidge's (2022) study, three EPs took part in semi-structured interviews and data were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings highlighted that training, learning, and knowledge were all key influences on how EPs responded to a CI (Prestidge, 2022). EPs reinforced the importance of training not only being theoretical but also practical, reinforcing the

importance of knowing how and when to apply the various approaches following a CI response (Prestidge, 2022). Attending training and gaining experience were both considered to be essential in developing confidence, highlighting that training can provide tools but experience enabled them to apply them (Prestidge, 2022). Although the study provides in-depth themes related to the role of the EP in responding to CIs, the sample size was small with three participants, in comparison to the recommended sample size of 6-10 participants for small scale research projects (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However more recent guidance from Braun and Clarke (2022) encourages researchers to reflect on the information richness of the data set and how well it aligns with the studies aims, a concept known as Information power.

Further research highlighted that most of the training for EPs to support with CIs takes place once they have completed their professional training (Adamson & Peacock, 2007, as cited in Dunne et al., 2022). Research outcomes indicate that this has led to many EPs feeling less competent in supporting with CIs than other areas of their practice (Adamson & Peacock, 2007, as cited in Dunne et al., 2022). Bennett et al. (2021) explored EPs perceptions of CI training using an online survey, completed by 95 EPs within the UK. Findings showed that 76.5% of EPs felt that they needed more training covering both knowledge and experiential based training to support with CIs (Bennett et al., 2021). EPs reported that they wanted the training to include guidance on what to expect, policy-based information and to develop their knowledge on topics such as bereavement, trauma and suicide (Bennett et al., 2021). Furthermore, they also requested the opportunity to share best practice and resources with colleagues and to

increase their knowledge of local support networks (Bennett et al., 2021). As the survey was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the EP's experiences may have been impacted by the context. Furthermore, as the responses were shared through a survey rather than interviews, EPs responses will have been limited.

Following the Manchester arena attack, research was commissioned by the North West Association of Principal EPs through the University doctoral programme to develop an online resource to support both EPs and school staff with feeling more prepared when responding to a CI (Dunne, 2021; Dunne et al., 2022). Five EPs led a task group to develop the resource adopting a qualitative action research design. The aim of the resource was to empower school leaders to independently access the resources and feel more confident in responding to a CI alongside the support of an EP. This is in addition to developing the school staff's knowledge around key topics such as trauma and bereavement (Dunne et al., 2022). Whilst Dunne et al. (2022) notes that EPs are best placed to advise on how the resource will be used, they also suggest training a member of school staff on the resource who will be able to support access to materials during a CI, alongside EP support. A limitation of the study is that although the resource outlines the intentions of the resource, there has been no evaluation on its effectiveness in responding to a CI. This reflects a wider issue that there is limited evaluation of CI support for schools in general and the impact it has on school communities (Dunne, 2021). Consequently, there have been recommendations for further evaluation of the support provided by EPs following a CI and the emotional support provided to school communities (Dunne, 2021).

In summary, research findings reinforced the unique role of the EP in applying psychological theory, facilitating systemic change, and supporting collaboration and autonomy through consultation (Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). This remains consistent with the findings in part A. EPs also highlighted the benefits of working in a multi-agency team, including sharing expertise and developing wider relationships, however CIRTs needed coordination to prevent professionals attending unnecessarily (Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). Practical support for schools was identified as important including providing flexible written guidance, scripts and letter templates to provide reassurance (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Silver, 2014). However, EPs noted that practical guidance should not replace direct EP support, which is important in developing resiliency through providing emotional containment and empowering school staff (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Prestidge, 2022).

As EPs often receive CI training once they are qualified, many shared they felt unprepared when supporting with a CI (Adamson & Peacock, 2007, as cited in Dunne et al., 2022). Consequently, Dunne (2021) and Dunne et al. (2022) developed an online resource following the Manchester Arena Bombing to improve preparedness for EPs and schools, however without formal evaluation, the resources effectiveness is unknown.

3.6.4. Key themes from school staff participants

This section outlines the key themes from the literature review based on School staff participants perspectives. The themes include the 'Emotional Impact of CIs on school

staff', 'Emotional Containment', 'Supporting with ongoing supervision', 'The role of pastoral support', and 'Resilience and Post Traumatic Growth'.

3.6.4.1. Emotional Impact of CIs on school staff

A recent study carried out in a single LA in Wales, explored the experiences of senior school staff when responding to a CI and their perceptions of a CI model of preparation and response delivered by their LA EPS (Morgan, 2020). Seven secondary headteachers took part in semi-structured interviews and data were analysed using thematic analysis (Morgan, 2020). Two of the 16 overarching themes from Morgan's (2020) study 'Pressures' and 'Psychological impact' related to emotional responses, which highlighted that school staff felt shocked, upset, and angry following a CI. This is consistent with literature on bereavement and grief (Costelloe et al., 2020; Silver, 2014).

School leaders identified experiencing pressure as a key theme which stemmed from trying to manage their own feelings whilst supporting the school community (Morgan, 2020). Many participants also felt the expectation of them in their professional role as being emotionally detached and having a professional composure, conflicted with their own emotions and experiences following the CI (Morgan, 2020). Consequently, this disparity may lead to school staff not displaying any feelings and becoming vulnerable to experiencing disenfranchised grief, whereby a person's grief is not validated or socially accepted (Hall, 2014, as cited in Morgan, 2020). This can lead to a longer-term

impact on mental health and wellbeing; therefore, it is an important consideration when EPs provide support to school communities (Morgan, 2020).

Although Morgan's (2020) research was carried out with secondary school staff in a single LA, a further study exploring how primary school staff are supported in responding to bereaved children shared similar findings in relation to the negative emotional impact on their wellbeing (Costelloe et al., 2020). Sixteen primary school staff took part in semi-structured interviews, findings showed that after supporting CYP following a bereavement, participants experienced increased levels of stress, emotional exhaustion and fatigue (Costelloe et al., 2020). Although the study focused on bereavement rather than specifically on CIs, the findings reinforce the vulnerability of professionals in caring professions to experiencing compassion fatigue and becoming emotionally overwhelmed (Costelloe et al., 2020). This is due to the stress and emotional exhaustion of supporting another person's grief or loss (Costelloe et al., 2020). Furthermore, CIs often include bereavements, as outlined in section A (Beeke, 2013).

Some participants reported that the bereavements of others triggered their own experiences which intensified their own emotional difficulties (Costelloe et al., 2020). Many participants reported a lack of guidance and skills when supporting bereaved children, leading to uncertainty and fear of doing or saying the wrong thing (Costelloe et al., 2020). However, direct support from senior leaders, experienced staff, and external agencies such as EPs, increase their confidence in supporting CYP (Costelloe et al.,

2020). Similar findings were identified in Morgan's (2020) study, where some senior leaders described feeling unskilled and untrained in responding to CI and recommended that grief and bereavement support be integrated into CI training (Morgan, 2020).

Blanchette's (2024) findings further highlighted the value of the EP role, with the subtheme 'Knowledge is power', reinforcing how EP's psychological theory and skills were extremely beneficial in supporting staff following the CI. These findings reinforce the importance of support from external and internal support mechanisms to build organisational resilience and minimise the impact of the CI on staff wellbeing (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024). Therefore, the next section will focus on supporting schools with emotional containment.

3.6.4.2. Emotional containment

To support the school system with responding to bereavement and grief, Costelloe et al. (2020) suggests combining Bronfenbrenner's (2005) framework with the psychodynamic model of emotional containment (Bion, 1983) (Figure 2). Through including the additional lens of containment, it reinforces the emotional impact on the school community. Bion's (1983, as cited in Costelloe et al., 2020) theory of containment, describes an active experience of emotional connection whereby a parent understands and processes a child's emotional distress and responds to the child without becoming overwhelmed themselves (Bion, 1983, as cited in Costelloe et al., 2020). Containment provides emotional security which supports CYP to regulate and understand their

emotions whilst managing difficult experiences (Bion, 1983, as cited in Costelloe et al., 2020).

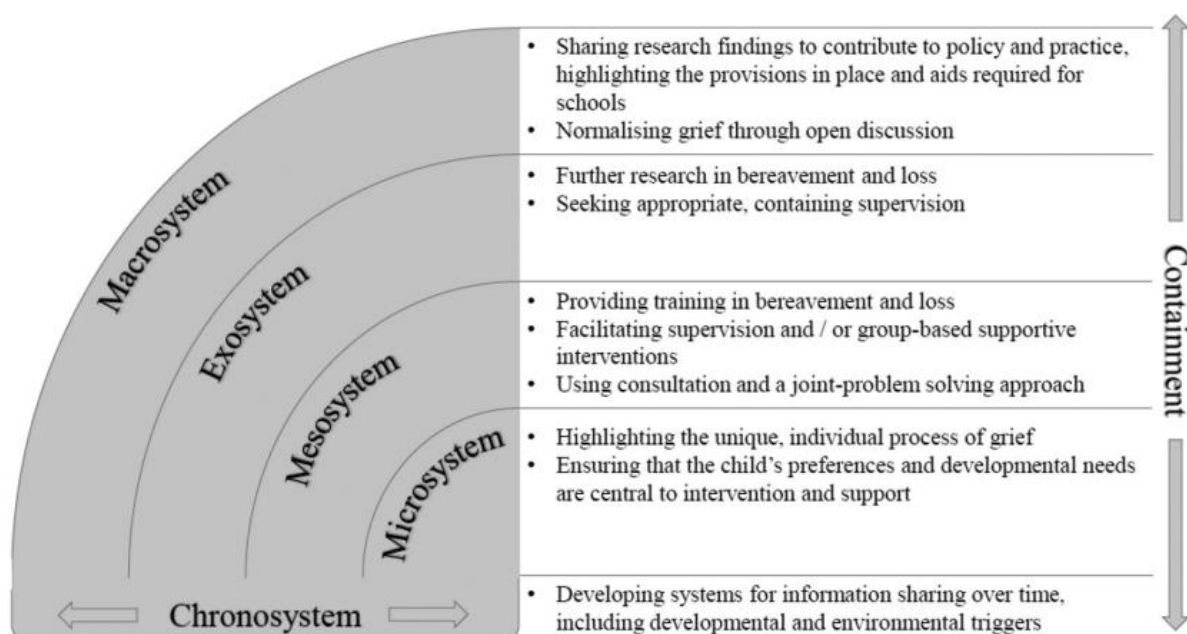


Figure 2: Implications for EP Practice (Costelloe et al., 2020)

This theory has been applied to other dyadic relationships such as individual therapy and to the role of the EP when providing emotional containment to the school community following a CI in addition to practical support (Brennan, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020). Costelloe et al.'s (2020) findings reinforce the importance of senior leaders adopting a 'containing' role to support the emotional wellbeing of CYP and staff whilst the EP facilitates containment across the wider school system. Furthermore, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological framework will also increase awareness of the environmental and developmental factors that impact on the school. This will enable the

school to put support systems in place at important times, such as during transition or anniversaries (Costelloe et al., 2020). The model (Figure 2) provides recommendations of support that EPs and school staff can provide at each level of the system whilst ensuring the needs of CYP remain at the centre of the 'microsystem' (Costelloe et al., 2020). Using collaborative approaches between the EP and school community are considered important at the 'mesosystem' level such as consultation, supervision and training, whilst also supporting with ongoing containment. Finally, the model highlights the significance of the education system in a containing and safe environment for CYP and staff at the 'macrosystem' level (Costelloe et al., 2020).

Blanchette's (2024) research which explored eight primary school senior leaders' perceptions of the support they received from EPs during a CI, highlighted 'Supporting the Supporters' as a key theme. School leaders reported feeling supported by the EP, whilst they were trying to support the rest of the school community, which they felt was important for their own wellbeing (Blanchette, 2024). Providing this support may reduce the risk of compassion fatigue resulting from supporting others cope with grief or loss (Costelloe et al., 2020). They also felt this support was important to remind them to look after their own wellbeing. School leaders also identified the importance of having existing relationships with the EPS and that receiving the immediate support helped to make them emotionally supported (Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024). The subtheme 'A familiar Face' reinforced the importance of EPs already having knowledge of the school and the school community system prior to the CI (Blanchette, 2024). School staff also noted that their relationship with the EPS, influenced how open they

felt talking to the EP about the CI. Similarly, studies involving secondary headteachers and teachers also emphasised the value and importance of pre-existing relationships with the EPS following a CI (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020). School staff also noted the importance of EPs being aware of the school system and its strengths and weaknesses to know how best to support (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020).

Secondary school leaders also recognised the importance of the human element of the EP support they received, by providing a caring approach which was considered to be essential to supporting the school community following a CI (Morgan, 2020). These findings support the benefits of EPs using the COPE consultation model (Beeke, 2021) with schools due to its focus on developing a sense of safety through providing a supportive network and developing positive relationships and connectedness. Supervision can also provide a valuable approach to providing emotional support to school leaders, this is explored in the following section.

3.6.4.3. Supporting with ongoing Supervision

Research carried out with senior leaders in primary and secondary schools found that by prioritising the emotional needs of the school community over their own emotional needs following a CI, they often experienced an emotional delay (Blanchette, 2024; Morgan, 2020). This was due to not having time to process their emotions immediately after the CI, resulting in their emotions being processed at a later time. For example, in

Blanchette's (2024) study, the theme 'picking up the pieces', indicated that school staff would benefit from longer term emotional support and follow up supervision, in addition to an initial response following a CI (Beeke, 2021; Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020). Senior leaders also considered the difficult times for the school community such as anniversaries and court dates associated with the CI. Therefore, suggesting that EPs should continue to provide support in the ways identified (Blanchette, 2024).

Similarly, Hayes and Gaukroger (2024) explored school staff views of the psychological support provided by EPs in phase two of their study. Seven school staff, one primary and six secondaries took part in semi-structured interviews and data were analysed using thematic analysis. School staff valued direct EP contact as they provided space to talk, thus supporting with the wellbeing of the school community. Although follow up support was often provided by multi agency partners or internal support systems, staff specifically valued the check in from the EP who had provided the initial support, due to the existing relationship. School staff also valued the guidance and strategies provided by EPs which helped to build confidence and support them with responding to questions about the CI. Whilst most participants shared that they benefited from the EP support, some shared barriers such as their 1:1 meeting being interrupted, or they felt they did not have enough time. Some also noted the ambiguity around the EP which prevented them from accessing support. Thus, reinforcing the importance of providing clarity around the EP role in relation to CI response, contracting expectations to prevent lines

being blurred between supervision and counselling and signposting to external agencies where appropriate (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024).

Whilst much of the research has discussed the benefits of EPs providing individual supervision to school staff due to their existing relationships, EPs are also well placed to deliver group supervision due to their experience in supporting with group-based interventions (Costelloe et al., 2020). Costelloe et al. (2020) suggests a psychodynamic approach to supervision, similar to the approach used with Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) to support school staff following a CI, proposing the concept of 'containing the containers'. This model of supervision encourages group reflection on the problem situation relating to the CI, rather than purely focusing on the solutions (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015, as cited in Costelloe et al., 2020). However, it is important the session does not focus on school staff all sharing their emotional experiences of the CI as this would become a CISC and could result in secondary trauma occurring (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Conlon et al., 1999; Hawker & Hawker, 2015; Rose et al., 2002; Wei et al., 2010). Using group supervision alongside consultation is beneficial through providing a dual function of containment whilst also empowering school staff to support the wider school community (Costelloe et al., 2020). The next section will also explore the role of pastoral support as an internal support system.

3.6.4.4. The role of pastoral support

In addition to external support provided by EPs and multi agencies, Atwell (2017) explored how schools cope psychologically with CI with a specific focus on support processes. Eleven schools from a single LA took part in semi-structured interviews and data were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings indicated that a strong pastoral response in addition to pre-existing relationships positively impacted on the psychological coping and wellbeing of the CYP following a CI (Atwell, 2017; Costelloe et al., 2020; Morgan, 2020). These findings align with earlier research outlining the importance of pastoral staff and school based mental health practitioners being best placed to emotionally support CYP with targeted interventions and supportive empathetic classrooms (Beeke, 2021; DfE, 2023a; WG, 2021).

A strong pastoral response significantly contributed to whole school stability and re-establishing routine which led to reduced stress and an enhanced sense of preparedness for future CIs (Atwell, 2017). The return to routine and maintaining the equilibrium of the school environment was identified as being instrumental in supporting the psychological coping of CYP following a CI (Atwell (2017). Having a strong pastoral network in the school minimised the need for external support as staff recognised the value of established networks and existing relationships to provide emotional support (Atwell, 2017). School staff also recognised the benefits of the EP acting as a catalyst, supporting with processes, whilst facilitating emotional containment, thus empowering staff to develop resilience for future CIs rather than becoming too reliant on the EP (Atwell, 2017). Even with strong external and internal support mechanisms, school staff reported that achieving deeper psychological normalisation can sometimes be a

challenge. School staff also experienced feelings of shock and helplessness following the CI, regardless of how prepared they were, arguably reinforcing a role for the EP in supporting the school system in response to a CI. A limitation of the study is its focus on how school staff cope following a CI, without exploring the role of the EP in providing support.

3.6.4.5. Resilience and Post Traumatic Growth

Research also highlighted that some school staff experienced positive psychological change following a CI (Beeke, 2021; Morgan, 2020; Silver, 2014). The positive change is identified as post traumatic growth (PTG) which is described as “positive change experienced as a result of the struggle with trauma” (Meyerson et al., 2011, p.949 as cited in Atwell, 2017). PTG can transpire through five domains: opening up new opportunities, developing relationships, feelings of personal strength, spiritual changes and appreciation for life (Little et al., 2011, as cited in Morgan, 2020).

Morgan’s (2020) research highlighted two subthemes relating to PTG, Systemic PTG and Individual PTG. Two secondary school leaders reported developing new and existing relationships within the school community, one leader also shared their experience of having an increase in personal strength following the CI.

In addition to this, a subtheme of School Community Resiliency demonstrated that school leaders had developed elements of resiliency following the CI (Morgan, 2020). This is consistent with previous research, such as Silver (2014) which showed that prior

experience of CIs was associated with higher confidence levels and a lower perceived need for external support. Whilst it is important not to dismiss the negative impact and emotional distress of CIs that can result from experiencing a CI, it is useful to recognise that PTG provides an alternative lens to how the aftermath of a CI is viewed. Through adopting a PTG model, EPs can provide a sense of hope by focusing on the school staff strengths and identify new opportunities to support personal growth and recovery of school communities (Beeke, 2021).

In summary, research shows that CIs have a significant emotional impact on school staff such as staff experiencing feelings of shock, upset and anger (Costelloe et al., 2020; Morgan, 2020; Silver, 2014). School leaders often struggle with managing professional composure whilst managing their own emotions, leading to disenfranchised grief and compassion fatigue (Costelloe et al., 2020; Hall, 2014, as cited in Morgan, 2020; Morgan, 2020). EPs have an important role in providing containment to school; leaders, whilst they support the school community, this is highlighted through a collaborative model of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) framework and Bion's theory of containment (Bion, 1983, as cited in Costelloe et al., 2020).

To support with the emotional challenges of the CI and emotional delays, school staff shared they would benefit from longer term support and supervision from EPs to provide emotional containment and guidance (Beeke, 2021; Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020). Research findings also highlighted the importance of a strong pastoral response to promote whole school stability and resilience following a CI (Atwell, 2017). Some school staff also reported experiencing PTG and increased

resiliency following a CI such as developed relationships, an increase in personal strength and personal growth (Morgan, 2020; Silver, 2014). Thus, reinforcing that when EPs use a strengths-based approach and empower school leaders, it can support recovery and resilience of school communities (Beeke, 2021).

3.7. Summary

The semi-systematic narrative review aimed to explore the following question “What support is provided by the EPS to schools following a CI?”. Twelve studies were reviewed, six studies focused on EP perspectives, five studies focused on school staff perspectives and one study focused on multiple perspectives. The themes highlighted in the EP research included the ‘EP approach to supporting school staff’, ‘Collaboration and multiagency working’, ‘Written guidelines and communication’, and ‘Training and resources to support EPs with the CI response’. The themes highlighted from school staffs’ perspectives included ‘Emotional containment’, ‘Supporting with supervision’, ‘Pastoral support’ and Resilience and post traumatic growth’.

Although there is ambiguity surrounding the role of the EP (Blanchette, 2024; Morgan, 2020; Prestidge, 2022; Silver, 2014), findings from studies involving EP participants consistently showed that EPs supported schools across all three levels, systemic, group and individual (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2014; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). These studies also reinforced the benefits of EPs using collaborative approaches such as consultation to empower staff and multi-agency approaches to share expertise when supporting schools (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Prestidge,

2022; Silver, 2014). EPs further highlighted the importance of providing written guidance, resources and supporting with training for EPs in responding to CIs (Bennett et al., 2021; Brennan, 2021; Dunne et al., 2022; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Prestidge, 2022; Silver, 2014). Thus, focusing more on the practical support, they provide to schools following a CI. In contrast the key themes highlighted in the responses from school staff related to the emotional impact of CIs and the importance of EPs providing emotional containment and supervision (Blanchette, 2024; Costelloe et al., 2020; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020). School staff also recognised the importance of their own internal support systems and described experiences of positive change following the CI, such as PTG and resilience (Atwell, 2017; Costelloe et al., 2020; Morgan, 2020).

Although the semi-systematic literature review identified common themes in relation to the support provided by the EPS following a CI, research exploring school staff perceptions of this support is very limited. Of the five studies that explored school staff perspectives, only three specifically explored school staffs views of the EP response or support following a CI. Two of these three studies were doctoral theses, and two were published in 2024, reinforcing the need for further research to be carried out in this field. Morgan's (2020) unpublished doctoral thesis explored secondary school senior leaders experiences of CI response, however, this was conducted in one LA in Wales and focused on one specific model. Blanchette's (2024) thesis explored primary school senior leaders perceptions of support from the EPS during a CI, this was undertaken in

two neighbouring LAs in England. Due to the regional closeness, participants will be sharing views based on the CI model used across the specific region.

Hayes and Gaukroger (2024) extended their research by exploring school staff views across the UK of the psychological support provided by EPs. However, their findings from the thematic analysis are limited as only one of the three research questions focused on this area. The other questions focused on the relationship between staff wellbeing and CIs using quantitative research methods. Furthermore, the participant sample were mostly secondary school staff (6 out of 7), with no senior leaders included in the sample. This may limit the perspectives of EP support to focus purely on a personal, rather than systemic level.

Whilst the studies drew on important psychological models to underpin EP involvement following a CI, none of the studies explored the use of SDT as a framework to empower and support staff. This may reflect the dominant focus on emotional containment within school staff perspectives, with emphasis placed on supporting staff emotionally rather than empowering them to take an active role in leading the response.

The study aimed to address two key areas that were overlooked in the current research:

- A combined focus of primary, secondary and specialist school staff experiences and perceptions of the support they received and would like to receive from EPs following a CI.

- The experiences and perspectives of senior leaders across a range of LAs in England and Wales offering insights into how EPs responses are perceived at a strategic level.

The research questions were kept broad in scope to allow the inclusion of senior leaders from different geographical areas across England and Wales and educational settings. This approach aimed to provide a breadth of perspectives informed by different CI models. By exploring both received support and desired support it also aimed to explore views around suggestions for future practice.

3.7.1. Research Questions

The current study aimed to explore the following research questions (RQ)

RQ1: What are school staff's experiences and perceptions of the support they received from EPs following a CI?

RQ2: What further support would school staff like to receive from EPs following a CI?

4. References

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Part Two

Major Empirical Paper

**Exploring the perceptions of school staff in relation to the Educational
Psychology Service Response and Support they received following a Critical
Incident**

Word Count: 9227

Part Two: Major Empirical Paper

1. Abstract

Rationale:

A well-established part of an Educational Psychologists (EP) role is to support schools following a Critical incident (CI). However, there is no official guidance provided by English or Welsh government around what the response from the EP should include and therefore the response and support from each Local Authority (LA) can differ. Furthermore, most of the research around CIs focuses on the perspectives of EPs, the small number of studies that include school staff perspectives are mostly focused in one geographical area and thus likely reflective of one model of EP response.

Aim:

The current study aimed to explore school staff perspectives on the response provided by the EPS following a CI, in addition to further support they felt would be beneficial.

Method and Analysis:

The study comprised of two research questions: (1) What are school staff experiences and perceptions of the type of support they received from EPs following a CI? (2) What further support would school staff like to receive from EPs following a CI?

Eight senior leaders from primary, secondary and specialist schools across eight LAs in England and Wales participated in semi-structured interviews via Microsoft teams. Four

themes were generated from a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) and 14 subthemes in relation to the research questions.

Findings:

Research findings indicate that school leaders benefit from a systemic approach from the EP that provides support and containment whilst also empowering schools to be autonomous and maintain overall responsibility for the CI response. The author proposes a systemic framework for EPs to use with schools that promotes the autonomy of senior leaders following a CI.

Limitations and implications:

Strengths and limitations are discussed, implications for EPs and wider systems are considered and suggestions for future research are explored.

2. Part Two A: Introduction

In recent years, schools in England and Wales have experienced a range of CIs which have had a significant and far-reaching emotional impact on school communities and the wider school system (Lowe, 2010; Lowther et al., 2019; UK Trauma Council, 2023). CYP are at increased risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder and experiencing difficulties with their emotional wellbeing (Costelloe et al., 2020).

Within the literature, there are considerable variation in definitions of CIs, however there is general agreement that incidents that may affect schools include sudden death or injury to pupils or school staff, natural disasters, violence, accidents, or suicide (Beeke, 2013). Beeke's (2011) definition will be used throughout this paper and defines a CI as:

A sudden or unexpected event that has the potential to overwhelm the coping mechanisms of a whole school or members of the school community. A serious or significant event, it is likely to be outside the range of normal human experience and would be markedly distressing to anyone in or directly involved with the school community (Beeke, 2011, p.13).

2.1. Context

Under the Civil Contingencies Act (HM Government, 2004), LAs in England and Wales are legally required to support schools with a CI response prior to and following a CI,

including developing and maintaining emergency plans. Whilst the Act does not explicitly mention EPs, those working within LA EPS have become essential to meeting these duties by offering specialist guidance and practical support to school communities. Due to Welsh devolution, separate guidance for English (DfE, 2021; 2023a; 2024) and Welsh policy (WG, 2021; 2025) is provided, both reinforce the importance of schools leading a whole school approach to CI and mental health response, whilst also providing direct support for CYP by trusted adults.

EPs are uniquely placed to provide support to schools following a CI due to their psychological knowledge, experience of trauma informed practice and established relationship with schools (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Beeke, 2011; Beeke, 2021; Bennett et al., 2021; BPS, 2017; Hayes & Frederickson, 2008; HCPC, 2023; Lee & Woods, 2017; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Lowther, 2023; Posada, 2006; Silver, 2014). Their ability to work collaboratively with multi agencies and support mental health and well-being enables EPs to provide tailored, whole school support (BPS, 2017; HCPC, 2023).

Despite there being no defined role of an EP supporting with CIs, a consistent theme in the CI literature is support EPs provide to the school community across three levels: systemic, group and individual levels following a CI (Blanchette, 2024; Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2014; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). This aligns with established EP practice (Fallon et al., 2010). EP involvement following a CI has the potential to provide containment and to support systemic change, this will be especially important where some systems are working less effectively (Prestidge, 2022).

2.2. Psychological theory applicable to the school community

2.2.1. General Systems Theory (GST) (Dowling & Osborne, 2001)

GST (Dowling & Osborne, 2001) is a valuable framework to explore the impact of a CI on the school system and how it can threaten the homeostasis and equilibrium of the school system. Schools that operate as open systems are more adaptable to change, they are influenced by their environment following a CI and access external resources (Dowling & Osborne, 2001). However, even with an open system, self-generated change can still be difficult to manage, resulting in schools seeking support and advice from specialist services such as EPs following a CI (Currie & Hayes, 2021; Dowling & Osborne, 2001).

2.2.2. Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological framework is often used by EPs and reinforces that schools are well placed to provide support to CYP following a CI due to the existing relationships and reciprocal interactions that take place over time (Balk et al., 2011; Dyregrov et al., 2013; Rowling, 2003). Through adopting an ecological approach, the CYP is placed at the centre of multiple concentric circles of support that can impact on their development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Those within the 'Microsystem' such as family and school staff are best placed to support the CYP with emotional stability and re-establishing routines to provide a sense of normality (Balk et al., 2011; Baum et al., 2009; Dunne et al., 2022; Dyregrov, 2008;

Dyregrov et al., 2013; Feriver et al., 2020; Rowling, 2003). The 'Mesosystem' consists of the relationships between those in the 'Microsystem' for example the collaboration between the CYP's family and their school. The 'Exosystem' consists of external systems that may work directly with the school such as EP or health professionals. The 'Macrosystem' considers the wider cultural context which indirectly influences the child, such as policies and attitudes relating to trauma informed practice. Finally, the 'Chronosystem' refers to the changes in experiences over time, this will include the CYPs experience and recovery following the CI.

Costelloe et al. (2020) recommended combining Bronfenbrenner's (2005) framework with Bion's (1983, as cited in Costelloe et al., 2020) model of emotional containment. Emotional Containment describes an active experience of emotional connection whereby a parent/ adult understands and processes a child's emotional distress and responds to the child without becoming overwhelmed themselves (Bion, 1983, as cited in Costelloe et al., 2020). This emphasises the emotional impact on school staff who often prioritise the emotional needs of the school community over their own emotional needs following a CI, resulting in an emotional delay (Blanchette, 2024; Morgan, 2020). School staff shared they would benefit from longer term support and supervision from EPs to provide an opportunity to process their emotions and to support with emotional containment (Beeke, 2021; Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020).

2.2.3. Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017)

Self-determination theory is defined as “a broad theory of human development and wellness, with strong implications for education” (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p.1). It places a strong emphasis on an individuals’ intrinsic motivations for learning and development and how this can be effectively supported (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Whilst SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) has been explored within educational settings, particularly around learning and development and in mental health settings, its application to CIs has not been explored, to the authors knowledge. Despite this, SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) provides a valuable framework that EPs can use to support school staff and CYP following a CI. This is due to its focus on fulfilling three essential psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness that are essential for supporting healthy development and psychological wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

CIs can have a significant impact on the emotional wellbeing of the school community (Beeke, 2021), and therefore may impact on the school staff experiencing autonomy, competence and relatedness. Ryan and Deci (2017) highlight that the environment is a central factor in supporting the needs being met and recommend adopting a need-supportive environment. This may involve actively listening, respecting a person’s decisions and views, supporting with information and choice, encourage autonomy, provide gentle challenge and positive feedback and encouraging social interactions (Raeburn et al., 2024). Consequently, through promoting autonomy and competence, individuals will feel valued and empowered to take an active role in their recovery

(Raeburn et al., 2024). In a CI context, EPs are well placed to facilitate recovery and wellbeing of school staff and leaders by adopting a need-supportive environment. Further support for using an SDT approach is highlighted in Fawor et al.'s (2024) study, which explored the experiences of 34 occupational therapists who reflected on using SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) approaches in mental health settings via open ended questionnaires. Data were analysed through TA and three themes were identified. The 'Working on myself' theme reflected OTs engaging in self-reflection and personal growth. The 'Self-development' theme reinforced OTs feeling empowered using the approach and adopting more strengths-based approaches in their practice. The third theme 'Working with the person' highlighted the opportunities for OTs to build relationships, engage in collaborative problem solving, and provide opportunities to challenge themselves. Consequently, the findings showed that adopting an SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) approach, supported the psychological needs of both the practitioner and the individual receiving the support (Fawor et al., 2024).

Although SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) has not been applied within a CI context, its application in both education and mental health settings highlight the potential benefits for EPs. Through adopting an SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) informed approach as part of the CI response it would support the development and autonomy of school staff and leaders in responding to the needs of the school community. Additionally, Ryan and Deci (2020) also highlight that adopting a SDT approach can promote both wellbeing and psychological growth.

2.3. The systemic role of the Educational Psychologist in CI response

Consultation is a core EP approach and is often used to facilitate systemic change and to support collaboration and autonomy with schools following a CI (Larney, 2003; Leadbetter, 2006; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014; O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018). Beeke (2021) proposes the COPE consultation framework to guide support following a CI which incorporates Hobfoll et al.'s (2007) five elements of promoting safety, calming, self-efficacy, connectedness, and hope. This model encourages EPs and schools to work collaboratively to re-establish relationships with CYP, provide strategies to reduce anxiety, strengthen supportive networks and support with approaches based on positive psychology (Tedeschi et al., 2018).

Combining consultation with practical support such as example scripts and language can be beneficial following a CI to empower school staff to lead the support for the wider school community, whilst providing them with the skills and confidence to make decisions (Hindley, 2015; Prestidge, 2022; Silver, 2014). Dunne (2021) and Dunne et al., (2022) developed an online resource to improve preparedness for EPs and schools, however without formal evaluation the resources effectiveness is unknown.

A strong pastoral response to promote whole school stability and resilience was also identified as being important following a CI (Atwell, 2017). Some school staff reported experiencing PTG which is a positive psychological change and increased resiliency (Atwell, 2017; Morgan, 2020; Silver, 2014).

2.4. Summary

Research findings highlight the valuable role of EPs in supporting schools with their CI response. Studies involving EP participants emphasised the benefits of EPs using collaborative approaches such as consultation, multi-agency working and providing practical support including written guidance and resources (Bennett et al., 2021; Brennan, 2021; Dunne et al., 2022; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Prestidge, 2022; Silver, 2014). In contrast, school staff perspectives focused on the emotional impact of CIs and the importance of EPs offering emotional containment and supervision (Blanchette, 2024; Costelloe et al., 2020; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020). School staff also highlighted the importance of internal school support systems and described experiences of positive change following the CI, such as PTG and resilience (Atwell, 2017; Costelloe et al., 2020; Morgan, 2020).

Despite these findings, most of the literature is based on EP perspectives, with only three studies reflecting school staff perspectives on EP support following a CI.

Therefore, this study aimed to recruit senior leaders from a range of LAs across England and Wales, including primary, secondary and specialist schools to provide a breadth of perspectives informed by different CI models.

2.5. Research Questions

The current study aimed to explore the following research questions (RQ)

RQ1: What are school staff experiences and perceptions of the type of support they received from EPs following a CI?

RQ2: What further support would school staff like to receive from EPs following a CI?

3. Part Two B: Methodology

3.1. Research Paradigm

The research is rooted in a Critical Realist Paradigm, it acknowledges the multilayered complexity of reality and that it is shaped by its cultural, social, historical and political context (Braun & Clarke, 2022). A critical realist position seeks an objective reality whilst recognising that meaning is subjectively constructed by experience (Crotty, 1998). This ontological position enabled the researcher to explore the perceptions and experiences of school staff, whilst also recognising the cultural and social influences and understandings that may impact on their views (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The research adopts a contextualist epistemology as whilst it acknowledges a sense of truth, it also highlights the ambiguity of language and its meaning and the influence of the context (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Within a contextualist epistemology, multiple accounts of reality are acknowledged. Therefore, the researcher considers participants 'truths' as situated within the contexts in which they are constructed (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Participants experiences of support from EPs following a CI will be dependent on the context of the CI and the systems and policies within the LA that they are employed.

3.2. Research Design: Qualitative approach

In view of the researchers ontological and epistemological stance, a qualitative research design was implemented to explore the views of school staff in relation to the response they received from EPs following a CI. Qualitative research aims to make sense of how individuals experience and view the world through the perspectives they share (Braun & Clarke, 2013a). Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Data Analysis (RTA: Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.3. Participants

3.3.1. Participant Sampling

Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy to ensure they had relevant experience relating to the research question in order to provide 'information rich' data (Patton, 2002). Braun and Clarke (2013a) recommend between 6-10 participants is a sufficient sample for Thematic Analysis (TA) when carrying out a small project. However more recently Braun and Clarke (2022) have argued that rather than focusing on the number of participants, it is more important to reflect on the richness of the dataset for RTA and how it aligns with the aims of the research. The current study followed the recommendations and the author continued to engage in reflexive practice throughout the research process to reflect on the richness of the data.

Gate keeper approval was sought through NAPEP (National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists), a professional organisation for Principal EPs (PEP), in addition to the Principal Educational Psychologists in each LA within England and Wales.

3.3.2. Participant Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria were used during the recruitment process to ensure participants were selected according to the relevance of their experience (Willig, 2013). The criteria were outlined on the recruitment poster (Appendix 5), on emails sent to the gatekeepers and also on the participant information sheet. The inclusion criteria and rationale are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Inclusion Criteria for research participation

Inclusion Criteria (Participants must meet all three parts of the criteria)	Rationale
A senior leader in a primary, secondary or specialist school in England or Wales	It was important that the participant had a senior leader role in the school to explore perspectives from a systems level rather than purely from an individual perspective. The criteria for schools remained broad to allow for different perspectives from different school settings.
The Educational Psychology team have supported the school following a Critical Incident in the past three years	The research question focused on the response and support received from the Educational Psychology team. Therefore, it was important that the school had received this support in the past three years to ensure their experiences and views remained current.
Only one participant from each LA will be interviewed in a first come, first serve basis	Schools from one LA will all be supported by the same EPS following a CI. Therefore, the author chose to interview one participant from each LA

	to explore a wider range of CI models of response to provide a broader range of views and experiences of EP support.
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3.3.3. Participants recruited

Eight school staff from England and Wales were recruited to participate in the study. All participants were senior leaders: Head teachers, Deputy Headteachers or Assistant Head teachers. Four participants worked in primary schools, two worked in secondary schools and two worked in specialist schools (4- 16 years).

3.3.4. Recruitment Method

Participants were initially recruited via a gatekeeper letter to the Chair of the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists Cymru and UK. A follow up email was sent to the Chair of NAPEP Cymru and UK asking for them to reshare the recruitment information. To support with further recruitment, 94 PEPs from different LAs were emailed across England and Wales through research of LA websites that could fit the inclusion criteria. Only one school participant from each LA was interviewed and all participants were required to provide informed consent prior to the interview taking place. Interviews were scheduled at a time convenient for participants. See Appendix 14 for further detail of the recruitment process.

3. 4. Data Collection

3.4.1. Semi Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data as they align with the research aim and they can be useful to explore participants perceptions and constructions in depth, particularly when they have a personal interest in the subject (Braun & Clarke, 2013a). Whilst an interview guide was used to provide a structure, it also provided a flexible approach enabling participants to discuss topics that were important to them and to ask unplanned questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013a). Initially the researcher considered carrying out face to face interviews due to the sensitive nature of CIs. However, the research aimed to explore views from different LAs and regions across England and Wales, therefore virtual interviews were chosen for logistical reasons. Furthermore, the use of virtual interviews has increased in recent years due to the flexibility of reaching participants that are geographically too far away it has also been seen to have benefits for participants such as saving them time (King et al., 2019).

3.4.2. Interview Schedule

An interview schedule (Patton, 2002) was developed to guide the interviews (see Appendix 13). At the start of the interview, the researcher talked through the consent form and the participant form to remind participants about the purpose of the research and how their data will be used. They also provided an overview of the format of the

interview and reminded participants that they can have a break or discontinue the interview at any point.

The interview schedule included eight key questions, alongside a range of probing questions to encourage the participants to expand on their answers (Braun & Clarke, 2013a). The questions focused on exploring participants perspectives of experiencing a CI and the support provided by the EPS. Topics included what school staff found challenging following a CI, the role of the EP, support provided by the EPS and what support was most helpful or unhelpful. The interview followed a discussion approach and therefore, to maintain a continuous flow of discussion, follow up questions were asked to provide further clarity or to provide further detail to encourage in-depth responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

At the end of the interview the researcher talked through the debrief information and discussed the support available before thanking the participant for taking part.

3.4.3. Conducting the Interviews

The interviews took place via Microsoft Teams and lasted between 45-60 minutes. The researcher chose to audio record and use the transcript function on Microsoft Teams instead of video recording the interviews. It was hoped this would be less intrusive and anxiety provoking for the participant due to the sensitive nature of the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher replayed the audio recording twice to ensure the quality of

the transcripts in preparation for data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013b). The transcripts were anonymised and the audio recordings were deleted after a two-week period.

3.5. Data Analysis

For the purposes of the data analysis, a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) approach was carried out (Braun & Clarke, 2022). RTA is a method of data analysis which involves systematic analysis of the data set to interpret patterns and develop themes through a process of data coding (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Due to the theoretical flexibility of thematic analysis, it was important for the author to commit to the critical realist position when carrying out the thematic analysis to align with their beliefs (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This will involve recognising that the perspectives of school staff do not provide a direct view of reality, instead it reflects a participant's own reality within a specific context, thus reinforcing the importance of engaging in ongoing reflexive and reflective practice (Willig, 2013). An inductive approach was adopted to enable codes and themes to be developed from the data set and the researcher explored the meaning of participants responses at both the semantic and latent levels.

The author also recognised that elements of research and psychological theory reviewed whilst completing the literature review will also have influenced the data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In response to this recognition, the researcher duly considered the fundamental aspect of reflexivity within RTA involving the practice of critical reflection on the process and both the role of researcher and their research practice (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Furthermore, it enables the researcher to embrace the

research subjectivity and its role in the process of data analysis, rather than viewing it as a limitation (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This is further explored in Part Three of the thesis. The researcher followed the six phases of RTA developed by Braun and Clarke (2022) the process is outlined in Appendix 15. A summary of the rationale for using RTA as the method of data analysis is outlined in the table below.

Table 3: Rationale for choice of Analysis

Rationale for choosing Reflexive Thematic Analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a robust and sophisticated approach to coding the data and identifying patterns across the data relating to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2014). • Enables data to be presented in an accessible format for non-academic readers (Braun & Clarke, 2014). • Provides a flexible approach for the researcher as the techniques are separate from the theoretical orientation of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.6. Ethical Considerations

This research project was reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the Cardiff University School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, in July 2024. The ethical considerations outlined in Appendix 16 also adhere to the British Psychological Society Code of ethics and conduct (BPS, 2021) and the HCPC guidelines (HCPC, 2016).

3.7. Trustworthiness and quality of qualitative research

Yardley's (2017; 2024) framework was used to consider the trustworthiness of the research and analysis (See Appendix 17).

The author also used the 20 questions from the 'Tool for evaluating TA manuscripts for publication' (Braun & Clarke, 2020. p345) to assess the TA research quality throughout the research process.

4. Part Two C: Analysis

4.1. Overview of Analysis

The six-phase process of RTA was carried out with the dataset from each transcript (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This resulted in four overarching themes and 14 subthemes, which are visually presented in a thematic map in Figure 3 and explored in detail in Section 5. Examples of the initial development of themes from the coded data are provided in Appendix 18. Examples of the themes being further developed and refined in phases four and five are provided in Appendix 20 and 21.

The 14 subthemes all represent more specific nuanced aspects of a broader theme, allowing for a more granular understanding of participants experiences within the overarching theme (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In Section 5 the overarching theme is introduced at the top of each table and the subthemes and illustrative quotes are discussed to provide supporting evidence for each subtheme. All themes and subthemes are labelled from a supporting quote from a senior leader. Direct quotations have been used from a participant with xxx used to remove names that may be identifiable. The use of ellipses (...) have also been used to illustrate text that has been omitted to ensure quotes remain clear and concise to support with clarity for the reader.

Figure 3: Thematic Map



4.2. Exploration of themes

Theme 1: Having a safety net

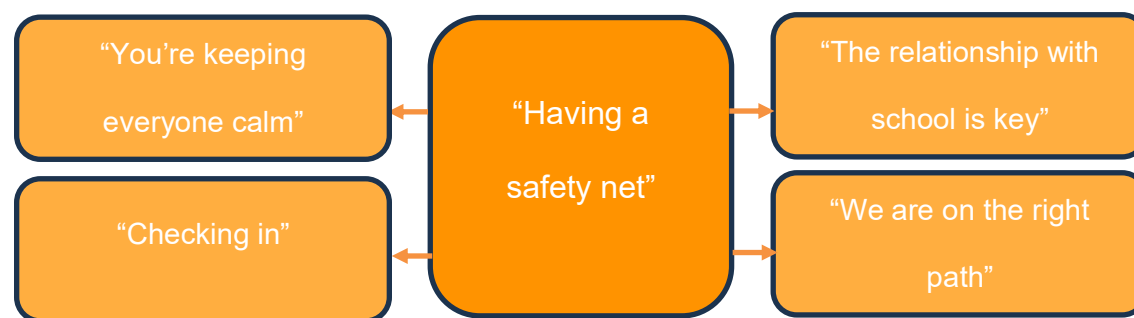


Table 4: Theme 1 (Having a safety net and subthemes)

Theme 1: Having a safety net
<p>The theme 'Having a safety net' reflects the emotional support and containment provided by EPs at a systemic level was identified as being extremely valuable by participants following a CI. Participants discussed the importance of feeling contained and being supported to manage their own emotions and for them to manage the emotions of the rest of the school community. They also valued the check in from EPs, reinforcing the emotional support. The importance of developing trusting relationships with EPs and the wider school community such as families was also recognised as being essential. Participants also reflected on the need for reassurance from EPs following a CI and having the opportunity to check they are providing appropriate support.</p>

Sub Theme	Illustrative Quotes
<div> <p>"You're keeping everyone calm"</p> </div> <p>Participants valued the emotional support and containment provided by EPs at a systemic level. Many noted the emotional containment they were providing to staff and therefore appreciated having the EP to support and contain them. Some participants did not have an EP that situated themselves in the school, however they shared that they still felt supported knowing the EP was available if they needed them.</p>	<p><i>P1: "I think from a personal point of view, having them both in a space where I kept coming back to forced me to interact with them. because each time I came back they asked me, okay, so how are you doing? Tell me how that went. Are you going to change anything when you do it for the next group of children? Have you eaten? Have you had something to drink?"</i></p> <p><i>P2: "I think they're quite flexible in what they can provide, what they offered us was for one of their senior EPS to come in with a less experienced junior and they talked through what had happened with the staff that were directly involved. And whoever felt that they wanted support, they offered it to everybody. So they did spend quite a good few hours actually with them, talking through what happened, talking through support for the teachers on a professional level and on a personal level."</i></p> <p><i>P3: "But I didn't feel like I was being left or placated. It was very much we're here and here's the support and we don't go away. You know we won't be in your face. We won't</i></p>

	<p><i>be messaging you every week and giving you a phone call and go, How did your day go? But it's we are on the end of an e-mail."</i></p> <p><i>P4:M: "You are very much supporting everybody else. You the person that is, you're keeping everyone calm. You're making sure everything happens. You're not thinking about yourself. So it was useful having them to just sit and listen."</i></p> <p><i>SP1:" Which was all incredibly difficult for staff because they're having to manage their own emotions and keep those in check to manage the needs of the students. So to have the EP be on site, just for people to drop in and out. I think whole team went at one point just so they could talk together. It gave them a bit more strength to go back and deal with the needs of the other children while still being able to grieve the loss of our students..... Just to be able to have the space to talk to him about how to manage the team. You know, your own feelings and then manage them."</i></p> <p><i>SP2: "The support for SLT is key because I think it's quite apparent the impact on the ground floor, staff are going to be struggling to deal with their own emotions while also</i></p>
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	<p><i>trying to support a young person, especially with complex needs as well which kind of adds to that. This time we asked for supervision on the second one to have ground floor staff and SLT separately. So could you pop in and see the SLT just how you do and have a cup of coffee with them? I mean, bless them, 15 cups of coffee that day because they were having coffee with everyone. But that was really helpful and actually the head of school opened up and kind of said I'm really struggling with this one and he opened up. Even though I do supervision for staff, the head of school won't come to me and say I'm really struggling, so having someone from outside was really key for SLT."</i></p> <p><i>SE2: "As soon as we jumped on to the meeting, I was very kind of like, right, okay. And he was like, how are you? And I'm like, yeah, I'm good, thanks. How are you? And he was like, yeah, but how is it going with you then? How are you managing with all of this? And I was like, oh yeah, I'm fine. Let's carry on. And so it's sort of like, you know, you could quite clearly see that there was that commitment to kind of knowing that there is a responsibility for somebody in my role to carry and therefore, they were both really very genuine."</i></p>
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"Checking in"

Participants shared how much they valued the EP checking in with them to make sure they were coping with the CI and to see if they required any other support. One participant shared that it was during a check in that they felt they were ready to talk about their emotions. This subtheme links closely to the previous theme on providing containment.

P1: "Yeah, so the EP checked in towards the end of the week and asked if anybody needed any more support or kind of plans going forward, we didn't need any more support at that time but it was just reassurance to know that you can go back to her."

P2: "Well, I think that's it. And I think, you know, check ins and things like that have been good."

P3: "Thinking of it, the EP would keep coming back to it to check that I had that understanding, I suppose, and that we felt comfortable, but not, you know, overwhelmed. So it did feel like it was our critical incident. It was our way of dealing with it. But in a right way, in a supportive and kind of professional way, as such and on a personal level. So it was right for us, you know."

SP:1 "Yeah. And he's in for annual reviews regularly. So he's amazing and it is that 5 minutes that makes such a difference."

	<p><i>SE1:M: “And the EP would just be on a personal level, checking in with me and so would just say how are you? and they were almost saying we have to speak to you. You know that you and the people who are immediately involved not only in the actual incident and I was perhaps not receptive to that initially. Then I just said look can I just have a really quick moment because, I just wasn’t sleeping and just I found the conversation with her was just really helpful.”</i></p>
<div> <p><i>“The relationship with school is key”</i></p> </div> <p>Participants shared the importance of developing relationships with EPs and the school community such as families. Where strong relationships were formed over time, this led to increased trust and respect.</p>	<p><i>P1: ” The children were quite surprised when that happened, but also kids are amazing art makers like they remembered what happened with xxx and we're actually really lucky. We've like xxxs family came in over the summer holidays with our site manager and there's a corridor outside of the office. That's one point to it. But that's our xxx wall and xxx got like loads of photographs up there.”</i></p> <p><i>P2 “But we're lucky enough to have that. You know, I know two people fairly well, so being able just to kind of know who I'm speaking to be able to get that help quickly. That's really key in those instances because a lot of the time, schools just feel like they've not dealt with anything like this before. It's, you know, can be really shocking.</i></p>

<p>Where there was not an existing relationship or trust with the EPs and insufficient time to develop this, it created a barrier and increased feelings of anxiety.</p>	<p><i>So for me, knowing them and you know that inevitably there's a little bit of a trust element, isn't there and someone rocks up that maybe isn't as experienced or isn't you know that in that kind of instance it's pretty bad. It's already feeling like you're lost at sea."</i></p> <p><i>P3:" It would be a very different approach so I don't think training effectively would cover enough of how personal it has to become. Nothing will beat that human contact of knowing there is somebody else out there, There is a team of people that can provide that."</i></p> <p><i>P4:M: "Relationships are key, you know and I think for us the relationships that we have with the majority of the parents here are really key because that meant that there was a lot of trust."</i></p> <p><i>SP1: "I think the relationship with the school is key. From our point of view, I mean it's a very specialist setting. I think having somebody that knows the students and the families and the staff has made a massive difference because people feel safe talking</i></p>
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	<p><i>to him. I don't feel he's going to judge them and they can just go and say what they need. They've kind of got it out in that safe space and then they pick themselves up, put the team back together and went and got on with it, you know, the day-to-day bit of managing the students."</i></p> <p><i>SP2: "So I think that mutual respect and understanding professionally kind of helps in the situation. You know, knowing that we are SEMH knowing that we actually focus a lot on development lands kind of real life like complex trauma. I think because of the relationship that we have, that's what made it work. If the educational psychology service was coming into schools and had a different kind of thing where they were more, you need to have this in place, you need to have this in place that would change the whole dynamic of the support that we would have asked for. Because again, you have that blocked trust kind of shield up, but we don't have that with them."</i></p> <p><i>SE1:M: "But they were just really excellent in their communication with us, which perhaps other services don't give us that same level of communication. But yeah, we're just having the EP and I think having on site, having the team here amongst us,</i></p>
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	<p><i>they felt like they were part of our community for that two weeks. But I guess it was a relationship forged in fire, you know. So I would absolutely trust the EP. I'd have no hesitation now in in reaching out if I needed to or maybe another member of the team anyway. Yeah, maybe thrown into it all together like that. Just did feel like one big team. No. So they established trust really quickly just through their professionalism and how slick they were.”</i></p> <p><i>SE2: “But should there have already been that closer working relationship within schools, that may have removed that initial anxiety that was felt, and it may have been that we could have that immediately be much more kind of open to right. Okay. Then help us out. Come in. Come and meet with me. Rather than that testing of the water, if that makes sense. For me, therefore, I know if I'm being very, very honest at the first point of meeting with them separately online. As I've said to begin with, I know that there was that just that little thought at the back of my mind of thinking, what are they going to say? What are they going to try and accuse of what is their? What is our suspicion going to be, what's their concern going to be, what is going to happen as a result of that meeting? What action are they going to take?”</i></p>
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"We are on the right
path"

Participants commented that the EPs helped to provide reassurance that they were providing suitable support to the school community, which helped to develop autonomy of senior leaders. Furthermore they also shared that the school community felt reassured due to the internal and external support provided to the CYP to ensure they were safe.

P1: "I guess like one of the most important messages they gave me was to tell staff that, like you can't do anything wrong. Like everybody's scared to have to say the wrong thing or to do the wrong thing. But actually, as long as you're empathetic to the children"

P2: "Yeah, I think it's probably that it what they've said makes me feel like, okay, my thought process is right. You know, you don't have to rush through counselling for a child. We don't, you know, we can feel our way around this. There is no right and wrong kind of response. So all those things that you think, OK, I think that's it. They reassure you that yeah, you're, you know, that is fine what you're doing is fine."

P3: "And we weren't overloaded with things. I almost felt at times I was asking for things and thinking ahead, and the EP was going. It's OK to just stop and be here in the minute and let's do the bits we need to do for now. And then if that does occur, then call me and then we'll deal with it sort of thing. I think she was very good at kind of saying let's only think of now and here we can think a little bit ahead, but don't."

	<p><i>P4:M: "What they did was they went through the protocol with me, which was really helpful and what was the most helpful was it made me think I've done all the right things. But it was really useful just to go through that and say right, have you done this? Have you done that? and just sort of talk through that process. And so that was good because I could say yes, I've done that. I've contacted this person, I've done this, contacted the parents, etcetera."</i></p> <p><i>SP2: "They kind of reinforced the stuff that I was applying because a lot of my stuff is around the mental health and the staff and the students and trauma etcetera so it kind of reinforced that we're on the right path."</i></p> <p><i>SE1:M: "Our children are really resilient, but the community and the family said that because of the educational support that we had that they just felt really reassured that the children looked after, so they've been reassured by how well the lockdown had been handled. And then they felt that that they could send their children in which really helped us because the educational support was so amazing. It allowed us to stay open and it reassured parents that there was something in place for the children."</i></p>
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	<i>SE2: "If we can offer anything here you go and a lot of what they were advising was actually what we were doing anyway. It was really important that we made contact with mum so that we could kind of go. Right, we're here, what do you need from us."</i>
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Theme 2: A specialist in the area

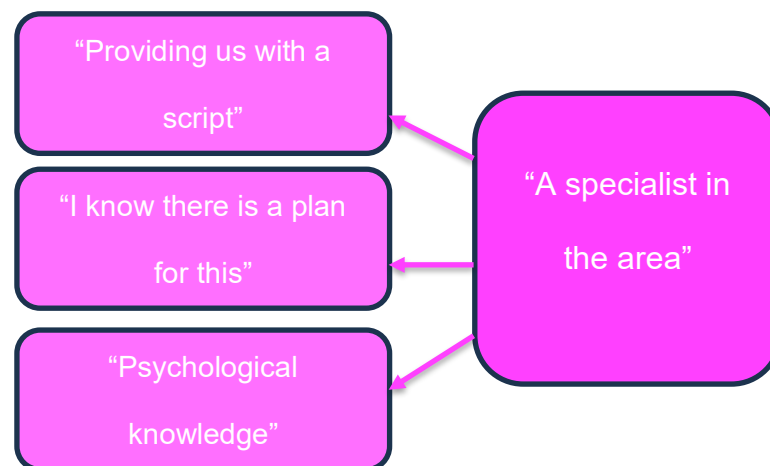


Table 5: Theme 2 (A specialist in the area and subthemes)

Theme 2: A specialist in the area	
The theme 'A specialist in the area' reflects the psychological knowledge of the EP and their combined knowledge of supporting with critical incidents whilst also specifically supporting the individual needs of the school. The theme also reflects the specialist skills of the participants and working collaboratively to support their strengths rather than providing an 'expert' approach. This theme also considers the importance of participants receiving the support with language and communication and the process.	
Sub Theme	Illustrative Quotes

"Providing us with a script"

Participants shared the importance of being supported with how to communicate effectively with the school community following a Critical Incident. This included support with writing letters through being provided with letter templates or EPs checking letters. They also identified the benefits of scripts for teachers or families to use with CYP which are specifically adapted to meet the individual needs. The use of very specific language was considered extremely important such as the term 'died' rather than 'passed away'.

P1: "Like the advice they gave us was around like, this is a definite thing. And so you almost have to treat it like you're talking to an autistic child. I know I said the word 'Pass away' about eight times already. But like, on that day, everything was well. xxx died. xxx died on Friday and that was quite tricky in itself. Being a Church of England school because there were members of staff who wanted to talk about heaven and actually the EPS advice was spot on. It was like you can't give any children any hope that xxx is coming back, you know. But they need to understand that xxx died."

P2: "But also practically in school, because we need to give support to the child and needed to know how to respond to the child, you know, to support the child as well. So that was useful. And then they signposted us to various groups that could support that particular incident."

P3: "The scripts were the bit that the staff. the most useful because at a point where they're struggling for words themselves, it gave them a very well, effectively, an approach that we had already always taken with the children. You know, an honest,

	<p><i>open up approach with the children that was matter of fact, without being scary or confusing.”</i></p> <p><i>P4:M: “it was useful to then actually have that help to write the letter and I had kind of drafted and written it anyway. Just to sort of go through some of the things that I could say in terms of, you know, re-establishing the rhythms and routines and things like that. But also having resources and somebody who could put that immediate advice in terms of how you handle those conversations, because what I had to do was provide that information to the staff. What to do? What do you do when the child starts now talking to you about what's happened?</i></p> <p><i>SP1: Trying to find the right ways to support our children whose needs are so different. We have a few verbal kids, we have kids who will communicate with photos or with symbols, but we have a very high percentage group, so we're not uniform and it's trying to find ways that are meaningful for them. To explain the loss that you know they notice in their own ways and it's working with xxx to help us work out how we meet those individual needs.</i></p>
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	<p><i>SEM1: The EPs from the critical incident team were fantastic in providing us with a script that we could go through as well with the pupil. So form teachers had something that they could say that they could go through that they could read with the children. So we've just become good at supporting our children when these real moments of crisis sort of happen."</i></p>
<div> <p>"I know there is a plan for this"</p> </div> <p>Participants outlined the importance of having a plan such as a flowchart to follow at the start of the critical incident. Where this was in place it was considered to be beneficial as it</p>	<p><i>P1: The start of the critical incident kind of flow chart within the local authority is first of all that you just get to talk to somebody about what's happened and you talk about what's going to happen now."</i></p> <p><i>P3: "I do wonder if maybe if there is like a flow chart or just, do you know this is what the EP service cover? These are things that we do for you. Maybe even if there's like an appendix, that's like, here's a flow chart of the sort of support you're offered. Or here's, here's what our team can do or permanent features on websites or links or Padlets, or you know all those types of learning gateway and things like that. If all</i></p>

<p>provided a structure to follow whilst remaining adaptable. Some participants were unsure of the EP role and it was suggested having a clearer overview of their role and the support they can provide would be beneficial. Ensuring contact details and policies are kept up to date was also considered to be important.</p>	<p><i>those things are there from local authorities or services, if we're reminded that they're there, then we can go there first .”</i></p> <p><i>P4:M: “I mean we've got our protocols and we've got our emergency plan. The Issues I had were a lot of the contact details have not been updated by the local authority, so therefore you know I was trying to contact people on numbers that weren't necessarily the right numbers or people who weren't necessarily the right peopleI kind of feel that like one of the things that would be good from this is for them to have a protocol of what we do to support the school. Rather than lots of emails from different people saying you know, is there anything I can do? I think something that's a bit more unified to say right here some contacts for this person to meet and one person to make that contact.”</i></p> <p><i>SP1: “Yeah, I'm saying we've got a very clear bereavement policy and there's, you know, the strategy system. The head is usually the first to know then I'm the second. Then we kind of cascade to make sure that everybody that needs to know gets to</i></p>
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	<p><i>know and then it's, you know, having a key link for the family. And so that we don't overwhelm the family."</i></p> <p><i>SP2 "I think when the specialist was working with us. It's the case that I like to have things sequential and structured, so I know we're doing this and we're doing that and for him there to sit and oversee that and go, yeah, we've got that and then you've got that and that was key. So I had a process. So I can imagine that there might be places where the process they don't have a critical incident plan, which is all developed. We had one already developed."</i></p> <p><i>SE1:M: "It was interesting because I certainly wasn't aware that the Ed psych team could respond in that way. You know, like I thought I assumed it would always be on an additional learning needs level. I didn't realise that they were there to support us with something. And we don't have in the critical incident policy about Ed Psychs and the role of the Ed Psych team. So maybe that is something that could be added on a county level of, you know, the Ed Psych team will be there to support you, but just rolling with it and being adaptable."</i></p>
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"Psychological
knowledge"

Participants valued the EPs psychological knowledge enabling them to support schools with psychological informed approaches such as how to communicate and approach the CI effectively.

Participants also valued a personalised response where EPs had a good understanding of the individual needs of the CYP and were able to adapt the response accordingly. Participants from specialist schools also highlighted that EP's knowledge of CYP with SEN/ ALN and multiple learning

P1: "We talked, I've managed to get some advice from xxx and xxx around like this, the kind of. Like the natural reaction from adults around children's grief and around how we could help the children, some children would know the news some children wouldn't know the news."

SP1: "Psychologists who have an understanding of the level of need about kids, and that's rare. So I think the biggest gap is the knowledge of children with profound multiple learning disabilities and their responses. So I think we kind of bounce backwards and forwards, so if there's something that I'm not sure about and I'll get in touch with xxx. And I think that's been kind of quite nice because we've been developing our skill sets together."

SP2: "The biggest part on that incident was actually, I'm very theoretical. I'm very much look at the theory, you know what it does and the empirical evidence and stuff and actually sitting with the specialist in the service to go through a critical incident. This is

<p>disabilities was essential in identifying how best to support and communicate with the most vulnerable CYP following the CI.</p> <p>Some participants also recognised their own skillset and how they were able to work collaboratively with the EP to develop their skills together.</p>	<p><i>what happens and it helped me process it an awful lot. Which was beneficial. I think the supervision for staff was really educational."</i></p> <p><i>SE1:M: "The children who are seen were children who were already on all of our radars, who had needs. The Ed psych team who are so well equipped to deal with children with those needs anyway, that when they were dealing with a critical incident and there's needs, they just knew the best way to support that child."</i></p> <p><i>SE2: "Really the advice was about kind of managing the way in which that's explained to staff. If I'm being honest, we didn't go with their explanation. They sent out a link to a document and it was all about kind of post suicide responses, they did offer that and it was us that went against it to an extent in the sense of that would not have been appropriate for all of these different contextual reasons. So we'd already, you know planned out that we were going to have a particular message for all staff."</i></p>
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Theme 3: We are always at the end of the phone

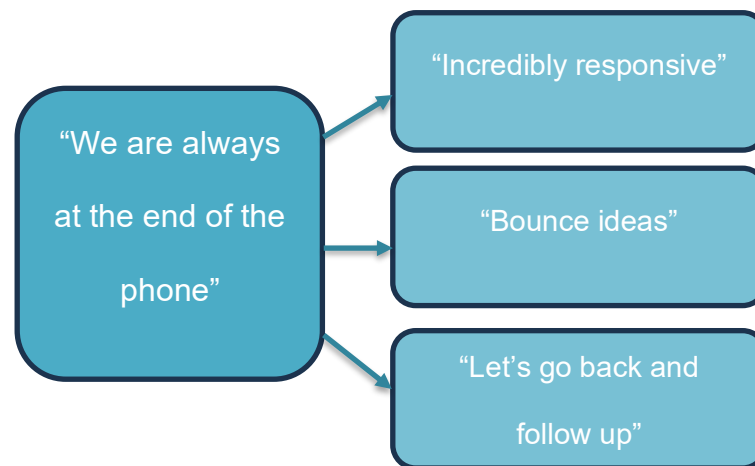


Table 6: Theme 3 (We are always at the end of the phone and subthemes)

Theme 3: We are always at the end of the phone
The theme 'We are always at the end of the phone' reflects how participants value the EPs attentiveness and their immediate response. They also shared the importance of having the EP available following the CI to regularly bounce ideas off and to provide practical advice. Participants also shared some of the follow up support they had received for funerals and court cases and recognised the benefits of having longer term emotional support.

Sub Theme	Illustrative Quotes
<div> <p>"Incredibly responsive"</p> </div> <p>Participants discussed the immediate response they received from the EPS and valued the support at short notice. Some participants also shared the importance of having a face-to-face meeting and a sensitive approach.</p>	<p><i>P2: "And we kind of needed it was not a situation that any of us in the senior leadership team had experienced as practitioners. So they responded quite quickly, which was brilliant because that's what you're looking for when you're feeling like you're dealing with the unknown. And physically come into schools. So we're not doing it virtually, not just doing it on the phone, that physical presence has really helped, I think."</i></p> <p><i>P3: "She made an appointment to sort of ring me at 10:30 and then just kind of run through and ask me sort of what had we already done in the meantime. I think the phone call was the first real body of support from the team, it was incredibly sensitively dealt with, but it was very matter of facts so that the EP could get kind of an idea of where we were up to and what really her team needed to kind of focus on next."</i></p> <p><i>P4:M: "For me, one of the key things was that it was a face to face meeting with somebody that could actually have listened to what you had to say. I mean, I was</i></p>

	<p><i>dealing with a lot of letters and so on, and mostly I was getting lots of emails or comments about how everything was, you know, went really well.”</i></p> <p><i>SP1: “I mean he's incredibly responsive and he did just rearrange. He's done it every time. He's just rearranged his appointments and just come and being available. It kind of varies. It's he's somebody that we can go back to.”</i></p> <p><i>SE2: “As our EPS and so at the time it was xxx and they were very supportive and actually very quick to articulate.”</i></p>
<div> <p>“Bounce ideas”</p> </div> <p>Participants shared the importance of being able to ask EPs informal questions and receive practical advice following the CI. This also reinforced the importance of the availability of the EP in being able to ask for their advice.</p>	<p><i>P1: “Both EPs set up in my office for the whole day and were just there for any adults who needed them. What was great was because I kept coming back to my office, they were there for me as well, so I could just like ask any question, I was able to talk to the EPS about how we talked to parents, how we talked to children about that as well.”</i></p> <p><i>P2: “And so that initial support for EPS to come in and to be able to talk through kind of the incident and give them some practical things they can do, but also to say there is no one solution to reassure really was really helpful and it takes away that personal</i></p>

	<p><i>element of it, it's someone that's really worked very well trained, that can come in and offer that guidance that we wouldn't be able that soon, you know and to an extent, some supervision. But they've since signposted one of our teachers to safe spaces."</i></p> <p><i>SP1: "Deciding who's going to funeral, who's going to keep in touch afterwards, how we're going to manage in the classroom, and xxx really, really great for being able to kind of bounce ideas off when we're looking at and also for where we've got differences of opinion among staff who some can't cope with having the child's things still around."</i></p> <p><i>SP2: "And I think it was the fact I think it was there nothing forced. It was all just coaching. It was all just advice and guidance. And rather than having someone come in and say this is what you need to do, that's all."</i></p> <p><i>SE1:M: "Staff said that at no point did sort of me or xxx seem panicked. But I think it's because they didn't see the conversations that we were having with the Ed psych team as well in the background, maybe. So my advice would be to leaders is to lean on the</i></p>
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	<p><i>Ed psych team, knowing that the Ed Psych team in their team have their council. What you have your sort of. They provide, but just knowing that they will be there, they will catch you, you know, and support you in your role.”</i></p>
<div> <p>“Let’s go back and follow up”</p> </div> <p>Senior leaders shared the importance of having follow up support following the CI.</p> <p>Some senior leaders discussed the follow up support with funeral arrangements or for court cases. Some senior leaders also noted their delayed emotional response to the CI and recognised the benefits of having supervision at a later date to support containment once they had time to process the event.</p>	<p><i>P1: “They allowed me to get back in contact with them for like Funeral arrangements and stuff like that.”</i></p> <p><i>P3: “Yeah, it’s things like when we come up to the anniversary of the death. Although it was talked about at the time that, oh, in the future you might want to do. I mean, I don’t know if when it comes up to the anniversary of the death, I’m sure I would contact the EP because I’ve got her name and her e-mail. But actually that isn’t a critical incident anymore. I wonder if there is like a follow up or if there is something that we can access like this is what we do. This is what we cover. Here’s a process. Here’s a flow chart, just an update, just an annual reminder just to something else This has almost been a bit like supervision for me and talking through that process because I probably haven’t spoken about that since that had happened.”</i></p>

	<p><i>P4:M: "So I think maybe a follow up supervision protocol from the local authority to say right, it's a certain amount of time has passed. Let's go back and follow up."</i></p> <p><i>SE1:M: "We've also the team have come in, the Ed Psychs came in or supported in the run up to the trial as well. So whilst it is the same critical incident, it's sort of slightly different in terms of the response and how we dealt with it, sort of following the initial the initial sort of immediate trauma you know the sort of acute trauma of that moment and the following week when pupils."</i></p> <p><i>SE2: "They were very clear in saying, look, you know whatever you need. us like if there is something we're at the end of the phone."</i></p>
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Theme 4: We can almost run on our own



Table 7: Theme 4 (We can almost run on our own and subthemes)

Theme 4: We can almost run on our own
The theme 'We can almost run on our own' reflects the internal support systems and resources that participants identified that their schools possess to remain autonomous in their response to the CI. This includes staff having specific training and skills around mental health and bereavement and trying to maintain normality as much as possible. Participants also noted their increased skills and knowledge following a CI and how they feel more prepared if they experienced another CI. Many felt empowered to make decisions and lead whilst having the support of the EP. Finally, school leaders recognised the benefits of working collaboratively with other external agencies and other professionals to share experience and resources.

Sub Theme	Illustrative Quotes
<div> <p>"Gift of normality"</p> </div> <p>Senior leaders discussed the range of skills their school staff possess such as having mental health first aiders, pastoral support staff and how they were well placed to support CYP following the CI. They also noted the importance of getting back to normal as quickly as possible which identified the need for school systems to be supporting the CYP where possible.</p>	<p><i>P1: "We're dead lucky that one of our parents works for camhs, so she was able to come in and support. One of my teachers is mental health first aid trained, the kids teachers' from the previous year don't work the first half of the week, but they both came in on that and we kind of just flooded the room with, support for the children and that was really useful..... One of the things that the EP said to me was that, well, you can give that child a gift of normality, which is that like, if mum and dad choose xxx to come to school. Well, they want him to come to school because they're probably want him to be away from everybody being really sad all the time and then you give him trusted adults that you can talk to and speak to."</i></p> <p><i>P2: "You know we do get help where we need it. But we've also seen leadership team and got each other. So we can we you know we relied on each other a lot and we're more concerned with the staff and the family and the child was supported."</i></p> <p><i>P4:M: "We do lockdown practise every term, so all the staff and all the children, it's routine, they know exactly what to do. So we've got a learning mentor in school so, you</i></p>

	<p><i>know, obviously we can offer that. We've got the parent support advisor. So there are certain things we could offer as a school and advice that we could offer. You know, and so I think the key things are the immediate contact from one team rather than lots of different people."</i></p> <p><i>SP2: "It's looking at what the later impact or something like that was because there was lots of suppressed anger by a lot of the young people.....So the EPs came in, they weren't massively successful because I think the children weren't in a place where they didn't want to. Actually, they were quite closed off to things and it wasn't because it was a new feeling or something like that. I think it was just the case they weren't really, wanting to focus on that. So pastoral had a lot of work to do around that and pastoral did a lot of work around aggression in that area."</i></p> <p><i>SE1:M: "What we actually found was the best thing was trying to get back to normality as quickly as possible."</i></p>
	<p><i>P1: "Obviously, based on the actions that we've taken, so that when we needed xxx was terminally ill well. Well, fortunately, we didn't need to think about that process</i></p>

"We learned a lot"

Senior leaders shared the knowledge and skills they had learned from experiencing a CI and how this led to them knowing what processes to follow when experiencing another CI. Many felt this made them more prepared for the CI.

because we knew what was going to happen. It served us well the first time and we were able just to. Unfortunately, it felt a bit like deja vu. Yeah, yeah, I knew very much that it was like assembly wise and what I was going to do and it was celebration of xxx life."

P3: "I do think going through it was the best preparation because going through it now, I feel like if it was to happen, if something similar was to happen. I would know even without going to the EP the kind of things that I could go back on and support other staff and other leaders with."

SP2: "Yeah, I remember saying to the educational psychologists, I say, well, it's one of my skills now it's in my warehouse now that I can deal with the situation . I think you'd have to go through that experience to understand they this is what needs to be done because you know it's when you get in a situation like that you become automatic pilot..... I think, in hindsight, we did it differently the next time because the students wanted to go to people who they knew had a relationship with and it was a bit difficult having these new people come in also as well."

	<p><i>SE1:M: We learned a lot from it. We'll definitely learn. We're learning in the moment. You know, we didn't know when the EP and the team came in that first day. It was just like, what does this look like, you know? But you learn so quickly and appointments in place. And when will they see staff and just. Yeah. You know, you and just room as well. Even just basic things like providing with an actual space, you know."</i></p>
<p>"Having them in the background"</p> <p>School leaders shared the benefit of having the EPs in the background to support and check they were providing the right type of support. However they also appreciated being</p>	<p><i>P1:" I went through the Assembly that I planned and it was a celebration of xxx life and so I took that assembly and then worked with xxx class when they came in."</i></p> <p><i>P2: "I think when you're frontline and you're faced with these things, you know, I've got years of experience of things happening and I'm not saying they're ever easy, but I've kind of got, I've developed my own coping techniques and my own kind of whereas some of our teachers haven't had that, that might be the first time something dreadful that's happening to one of their pupils or the families."</i></p>

<p>emowered and having the autonomy to make decisions and approach the CI in their own way.</p>	<p><i>P3: "Can you check this letter for me? I'm sure there would have been that support, but actually to have the autonomy still in a time where everything else has already been taken away from us and everything's changed, I think. It meant we could personalise our response to our children, to my team, to what they needed without feeling overwhelmed, that I was not doing it right or doing it the right way, yeah."</i></p> <p><i>P4:M: "I find that as a school I can deal with most things because I have routines and I've got procedures in place. And because we are prepared and for me knowing that was a real help and the fact that we could just emulate took two minutes to shut the school down. It took no time at all. It was just all very smooth and for me that so there wasn't that running around like a headless chicken. So that that makes you feel like you've got an element of control."</i></p> <p><i>SP2: "I think as part of the actual process. having them in the background, knowing that they're there to support was like it seems any grieving process, you're there with people when you need them and it adds to your resilience in that situation. Having them external resources to fall back on. I think the freedom, once the education</i></p>
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	<p><i>psychology service kind of give us the freedom to do things in our own, but we're there in the background, that was really key."</i></p> <p><i>SE1:M: "So certainly I said whilst you can prepare and you'll have a critical incident policy in place and you know what the Ed psych team can provide. The best advice I can provide is you've just got to roll with it, so whilst you can have strategy and processes in place and that does help, but invariably and it's great because obviously you're not all running around like headless chickens. But on that day of even the actual critical incident, you do have to think on your feet. So there was like all our computer switched off, so we had no way of communicating with staff....So we have to think about how we could communicate with staff quickly, even stuff down to children desperately needing the toilet. You know, they're in lockdown, really simple things. And none of this is in the critical incident policy."</i></p> <p><i>SE2: "They were really personable about it and they were really kind of sincere in wanting to help us. There was no kind of like we are EPS and this is what we're here to</i></p>
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	<p><i>do. They were kind of like what can we do? What do you need from us? We are here. And actually it was only because they were kind of, you know, we know you've been in that role for quite some time. And actually, I'm quite proactive. So therefore I had already gone into right this is what we need, this is where we're at and this is how we proceed."</i></p>
<div> <p>"Finding our tribe"</p> </div> <p>Some senior leaders received support from external specialist services related to grief and bereavement which they found beneficial. They also considered the benefits of developing networks with other school leaders and mental</p>	<p><i>P2: "Subsequently they've kind of put us in touch with agencies that can support the staff in a more kind of ongoing way and that's been really useful as well. It was probably more reactive. I'd say there's lots on offer as kind of we, we have like a group called xxx. They're delivering specialist provision; they still fall under kind of the support we get from county and so some of their courses and workshops do relate to some of the things like bereavement and so on. So we're offered it through that, not directly through the EPS as such."</i></p> <p><i>P3: "For leaders it just becomes lonely, which is why we're putting all this time and effort into creating networks, I think it's important that we almost become a little bit segregated. We're almost trying to find our own tribes so we have our network I</i></p>

<p>health professionals to share resources and specialist knowledge.</p>	<p><i>don't know if the EP had said could you give us some feedback. That kind of, you know, following on from the critical incidents support you have. Is there anything more that you would like to share with us about your experience?They then could put it out for other people to look at. This is how other schools have felt supported during this time."</i></p> <p><i>P4: M: "And so some websites and some ideas for support. So I'd sort of put things together, but that was a really helpful thing to happen."</i></p> <p><i>SP1: "I've been working with a woman called xxx who specialises in bereavement for young people with learning disabilities and she's amazing. So I've been doing some stuff with her and I've passed that on to xxx on how our kids feel or how we know, or how we can support them. Yeah, xxxx and she's written a book called a special kind of grief. And it's a guide for supporting bereavement and loss in specialist schools. Yeah. And she's got a website. It's called back pocket teacher. She's incredibly helpful. And I was talking to her earlier this week and she said she said what she's done is a bereavement plan. So if you have a young person who's had a kind of catastrophic</i></p>
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	<p><i>loss then she's devised this plan that you kind of multidisciplinary family plan as to how to manage that young person's bereavement in school which we're going to adapt for our setting."</i></p> <p><i>SP2: "Having advice where here's a sample kind of situation. If a school were there and there was panic set in, having that in place would be really great to go and achieve well. This is some good practise, try this like case studies which have been done in the past and stuff like that, because yes, everything is different. There's like a standard thread, but everything is so different that you've got to try and be very dynamic with them."</i></p> <p><i>SE2: They were an agency that will specialise in grief counselling so that can be bereavement, but it can be bereavement around the loss of any relationship. So in other words, it doesn't have to be as a result of death. It can be all sorts of different things and it can be one to one counselling, but it can also be kind of like group work and so therefore it can be more educational rather than therapeutic practice. So, they said that they were happy to be available for staff in these incidents."</i></p>
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5. Part Two: D: Discussion

5.1. Overview

The current study aimed to explore the perceptions of school staff in relation to the Educational Psychology (EP) Service Response they received following a critical incident (CI). All eight participants were senior leaders (headteachers, deputy or assistant head teachers) in a secondary, primary or specialist school at the time of the interviews. The findings of the research are explored and discussed below in relation to the two research questions and the relevance to theory and research explored in the introduction. Implications for practice will be discussed, in addition to strengths and limitations of the research and finally suggestions for future research will also be discussed.

5.2. Addressing RQ1

RQ1: What are school staff experiences and perceptions of the type of support they received from EPs following a CI.

Findings from the data analysis revealed that participants found four key areas of support extremely important following a CI. This consisted of receiving emotional support and containment represented in the 'having a safety net' theme. In addition to the emotional containment participants shared the need for specialist support from an EP outlined in 'a specialist in the area' theme. This is due to their psychological knowledge, skills and experience of supporting with CI and CYP with SEN/ALN and CIs. Participants valued the immediate and ongoing support from the EPs illustrated

in the theme “We are always at the end of the phone”. Although they valued support from EPs, they also discussed the need for autonomy and being able to draw upon their own internal support systems and experience to support the school community. This was discussed in the final theme ‘We can almost run on our own’, these findings were much more prominent in this study than findings from previous studies on this topic.

5.2.1. Having a safety net

The responses within the theme ‘Having a safety net’ supports previous research findings which emphasised the emotional impact of CIs on school staff and the school community (Blanchette, 2024; Brennan, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020). The subtheme ‘You’re keeping everyone calm’ aligns with Bion’s (1983, as cited in Costelloe et al., 2020) theory of containment, whereby an adult understands, processes and responds to another person’s emotional distress, without becoming overwhelmed themselves. Thus, reinforcing the importance of the containing role of senior leaders to support school staff and CYP whilst the EP adopts a systemic approach to support the containment of the wider school system (Costelloe et al., 2020). The form of containment identified by participants that EPs provided varied depending on the EP approach and type of CI, however examples included checking in with senior leaders by asking questions such as “Tell me how that went”, and “How are you doing?”. Similar to previous studies, participants found the emotional support and containment provided to the school community enabled them to cope more effectively with the CI due to having their emotions contained (Brennan, 2021; Costelloe et al., 2020).

It is pertinent to draw upon Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological framework, as participants throughout the study have discussed the important focus EPs have placed on utilising the resources of the school at the 'microsystem' level. Through enriching the school staff who have developed relationships with the CYP, it enabled them to continue to provide the emotional stability and support to the children that is essential following the CI (Balk et al., 2011; Dyregrov et al., 2013; Holowenko, 2015; Rowling, 2003).

Thus, reinforcing the importance of EPs supporting the system around the child such as school community, teachers, and families by recommending the use of support networks and natural coping strategies to develop resilience (Currie & Hayes, 2021; Slawinski, 2006). This was highlighted by participants in the 'Finding my tribe' theme as an area they would like to receive further support with and is explored in section 5.3.

Research findings showed a variation in approach to emotional support by EPs. Some situated themselves in school for a couple of days, whilst others were in the school for up to two weeks following a CI. One participant noted the EP would be available at the end of the phone or email which still helped to provide the reassurance for the senior leader. Therefore, the level of containment felt by school leaders related to the overall level of support across the school system at each level of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological model and over time, rather than simply the support provided by the EP immediately following the CI (Costelloe et al., 2020). This included approaches such as developing trusting relationships with senior leaders, adopting collaborative approaches such as consultation and providing

regular opportunities for supervision (Blanchette, 2024; Costelloe et al., 2020; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020).

In addition to the overall support and containment, participants also identified feeling valued as a result of regular check ins from the EP to ensure they were coping or wanted further support. The check in from EPs often provided an opportunity for the EP to check senior leaders were happy with the approach they were using and to ensure they had a mutual understanding, thus empowering senior leaders to maintain overall leadership of the CI. This aligns with a SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) approach, which emphasises the importance of supporting autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Thus, encouraging individuals to feel valued, empowered and actively engaged in their own recovery and in supporting others (Raeburn et al., 2024).

Participants shared the importance of developing relationships with EPs and the wider school community such as children and families to ensure they felt supported and listened to. They also valued having existing relationships with the EP due to there being an element of trust that has already been developed. Participants from specialist schools felt it was also important that the EP had an existing relationship with the school community such as the CYP and their families as it made them feel safe. This supported previous research which reinforced the importance of existing relationships so school leaders felt contained and safe and so EPs were aware of the school system and community, enabling them to provide the most personalised support (Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024). Furthermore, the importance of developing mutual respect and understanding over time was discussed and

therefore senior leaders felt that an EP without an existing relationship may result in blocked trust. This is important to consider from a GST (Dowling & Osbourne, 2001) perspective whereby the blocked trust could lead to a school system becoming closed and therefore resisting change and struggling to engage with outside support and resources. This was evident from one of the participants who did not have an existing relationship or trust with the EP team. They felt that having a closer working relationship with the EP would have removed the initial anxiety and made them feel like they would be more able to open up to talk about the CI and accept the support. Similarly, research findings from two studies in secondary schools also reinforced the importance of having pre-existing relationships with the EPS as they reported it made them feel more valued and important (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020). Following a CI one of the participants shared that they did not have an existing relationship with the EP, however due to the EPs professionalism, effective communication and being on-site for two weeks they developed the trust quickly. Therefore, if the EP supports the school for a sufficient period of time or already has an existing relationship with the wider EPS, there may be the opportunity for a working relationship and trust to develop. However, if EPs only support schools for a short period of time, there may be insufficient time to develop a relationship, potentially placing the school at risk of not receiving the sufficient support.

Finally, participants shared that the support they received from EPs helped to provide reassurance and guidance (Hindley, 2015; Prestidge, 2022; Silver, 2014). Many participants were concerned about providing the wrong type of support and therefore receiving reassurance from the EP provided them with the confidence that they were providing appropriate support. In addition to participants feeling reassured,

they also noted how the school community felt reassured due to the quick response and the support available for the CYP and the families. These findings support previous studies which showed that when participants did receive direct support from other senior leaders and external agencies such as EPs, they felt more confident in supporting school staff and CYP (Costelloe et al., 2020). Thus, reinforcing the importance of support from external agencies and internal support mechanisms to build organisational resilience (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024).

5.2.2. A specialist in the area

The theme 'a specialist in the area' reflects the psychological knowledge of the EP combined with their knowledge of supporting with CIs whilst also specifically supporting the individual needs of the school. It also reflects that participants valued having their specialist skills acknowledged through a collaborative approach such as consultation or supervision rather than the EP providing an 'expert' approach. The subtheme 'Psychological knowledge' reflects the EP's knowledge and experience of supporting school communities with CIs and grief, bereavement and trauma.

Participants noted the importance of having evidence-based approaches and knowledge to provide them with a greater understanding of how to support their school communities (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). Participants from specialist schools also highlighted that EP's knowledge of CYP with SEN/ ALN and multiple learning disabilities was essential in identifying how best to support and communicate with the most vulnerable CYP following the CI.

One participant noted that the EP advice was not suitable, as it consisted of generic advice to support school communities following a suicide, rather than it being adapted to support the community following a CYP that tried to end their life. This

conflicts with the role of the EP in response to a CI as identified in the literature which is to apply relevant psychological theory and to gain a greater understanding of what is happening, to support the specific needs of the school community (Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014).

Participants also shared the importance of being supported with effective communication to the school community following the CI such as using appropriate language and supporting with written communication. This is outlined in the subtheme 'Providing us with a script'. Participants valued being provided with scripts to share with their school staff to support them with using appropriate language to ensure they are sensitive to the needs of staff and CYP. Similarly, research findings in previous studies showed school staff valued support with language and scripts to provide them with the confidence of what to say and how to communicate sensitively (Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Silver, 2014). Participants also noted the importance of support when communicating with nonverbal children such as through symbols or photos and how to make it meaningful. Some participants also valued being supported with letter templates or asking the EP to check their letters before sharing them with the school community to provide reassurance that they are suitable (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024). Through being supported with a range of scaffolds and support, many participants shared that they had developed their skills in preparation for future CIs where they would feel more confident with their approach. This aligns with the ethos of EPs adopting a systemic approach, aiming to build capacity and empower school leaders, thereby developing recovery and resilience within school communities (Beeke, 2021).

5.2.3. We are always at the end of the phone

The theme 'We are always at the end of the phone' reflects how senior leaders value the immediate and ongoing support from the EP following the CI. Participants discussed the importance of EPs providing an immediate response, illustrated in the 'incredibly responsive' subtheme and valued that the school community has been placed as a priority over the rest of the EPs responsibilities. They also valued the initial phone call from the EP as this was often the first point of contact which provided support and containment whilst also having the opportunity to share information about the CI, enabling the EP to tailor their support. Similarly, this was also found to be important to EPs themselves in previous studies as it provided time for them to think and reflect before responding to gauge the priority and support that is needed (Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). Participants also recognised the benefits of the direct contact with the EP in school, as they felt the EP had their full attention and it provided an opportunity to ask informal questions throughout the day and receive practical advice, thus supporting their wellbeing (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024). They also found the support beneficial due to focusing on informal supervision rather than being told what to do, thus reducing their anxiety and developing their confidence (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024). This approach aligns with the COPE consultation framework through adopting a consultation-based approach, EPs are able to provide a collaborative and non-expert approach whilst also incorporating a sense of safety, through developing relationships (Beeke, 2021). Furthermore, they are able to promote calming through supporting with some of the challenges, promote self-efficacy and promote connectedness through developing supportive networks and reframing thoughts to instil hope (Hobfoll et al., 2007; Tedeschi et al., 2018).

5.2.4. We can almost run on our own

The theme ‘We can almost run on our own’ reflects the internal support systems and resources within schools that enable them to respond autonomously to a CI with the support of an EP. Whilst previous studies refer to the importance of pastoral support and the potential for PTG following a CI (Atwell, 2017; Morgan, 2020; Silver, 2014), there has been minimal focus on the importance of developing the autonomy of school staff following a CI. Recent research from the mental health sector aligns with participants views from the current study that promoting autonomy and competence, can lead individuals to feel valued and take an active role in their healing process following a traumatic experience (Raeburn et al., 2024). This aligns with SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) which places a strong emphasis on fulfilling three essential psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness to support healthy development and psychological wellbeing. As CIs can disrupt the fulfilment of these needs, it is imperative that school leaders are empowered to feel a sense of control and develop coping strategies and skills to promote autonomy in their schools (Beeke, 2021). Previous research applying an SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) framework within a mental health setting showed that this approach not only benefited the individual they supported but it promoted their own personal growth and self-reflection (Fawor et al., 2024). This reinforces how adopting an SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) approach can support the psychological needs of both the practitioner and the individual receiving the support.

The subtheme ‘gift of normality’ reinforces the importance of the school systems maintaining normality as soon as possible. One participant recalled being advised by the EP that the most valuable support they can provide was offering the gift of

normality and supporting a child with trusted adults who could engage in supportive conversations. The return to routine and maintaining the equilibrium of the school is instrumental in coping psychologically post CI (Atwell, 2017).

Participants discussed the range of specialist skills and knowledge some of their school staff possess to support CYP following a CI such as being mental health first aid trained, pastoral support, learning mentor and a parent support advisor. This supports previous research which reinforces the importance of schools adopting a proactive approach to CIs by ensuring that school staff have the sufficient skills and training to effectively support the school community following a CI (Holland, 2016; Holland & Wilkinson, 2015). EPs are well positioned to provide this support due to their psychological knowledge and understanding trauma-informed approaches (BPS, 2017; HCPC, 2023; Hennessy, 2016).

Participants also valued the mutual emotional support exchanged with other senior leaders, enabling them to focus their support on the school staff, families and CYP. Previous research similarly highlighted the importance of senior leaders receiving emotional support to protect their own well-being and reduce the risk of compassion fatigue (Blanchette, 2024; Costelloe et al., 2020). Where the EP team worked directly to support some CYP in one of the schools, the participant found that the CYP were not open to the support and so were supported by their pastoral team instead. An earlier study highlights that having a supportive pastoral network in the school can lead to the school requiring less outside support due to the established network and relationships to provide internal support (Atwell, 2017). Thus, reinforcing the importance of school staff supporting CYP following a CI due to having the

greatest understanding of the CYP and the school culture in addition to pre-existing relationships (Atwell, 2017; Costelloe et al., 2020; Dyregrov, 2008; Morgan, 2020).

Participants also shared the knowledge and skills they learned from experiencing a CI highlighted in the 'We learned a lot' subtheme. Through experiencing a CI, participants were more prepared for future CIs due to becoming familiar with the process such as preparing an assembly and felt they would be less reliant on the EP as they would be more prepared to deal with the situation. Participants also discussed how they learned from their previous experience such as recognising the importance of supporting the CYP directly rather than the CYP being supported by the EP. Learning from prior experience can lead to high confidence levels and a lower perceived need for external support (Silver, 2014). The positive responses and positive psychological change to the CI relates to Post Traumatic Growth (PTG) (Meyerson et al., 2011 as cited in Atwell, 2017). Although participants recognised the challenges, they also have shown an increase in personal strength and resilience by using their experience to learn and develop their skills in preparation for a future CI (Morgan, 2020).

Participants discussed the importance of having EPs in the background to support and reassure them, but they all valued the autonomy of being able to make their own decisions and personalise their response, thus valuing a collaborative and non-expert approach (Beeke, 2021). One participant noted it was important to have that autonomy when they felt everything else had been taken away from them following the CI. These findings provide further support for using a consultation-based approach rather than an expert model, to empower schools by using problem solving

skills and drawing upon psychological principles (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). One participant discussed how they talked through the assembly with the EP which celebrated the life of the child and then worked directly with the class to support them, thus feeling empowered to take ownership of the CI (Dunne, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Silver, 2014). Participants also shared how having the EP in the background to check in with, helped to develop their coping strategies and resilience from experiencing a CI and therefore they felt more confident in the support they were providing (Costelloe et al., 2020). Following a CI, one of the participants recognised the importance of having their own procedures in place, which led to them being able to shut down the school in two minutes.

Participants also recognised that whilst they can prepare and have procedures in place to provide some structure, they do need to remain flexible. One participant noted that during the lockdown of the school, the computer system switched off so they were unable to communicate with staff and needed to think on their feet. This is supported by research which reinforces the importance of not having rigid protocols to a CI, enabling a flexible approach to support the needs of the school community (Prestidge, 2022).

5.3. Addressing RQ2

RQ2: What further support would school staff like to receive from EPs following a CI?

5.3.1. I know there's a plan for this

Participants discussed three areas of support that would be beneficial following a CI in addition to the current support they receive. The first subtheme 'I know there's a plan for this' relates to the overarching theme of 'A specialist in the area'.

Participants shared the importance of having a plan such as a flowchart to follow at the start of a CI. Where this was in place it was considered to be beneficial as it provided a structure and guidance to follow, whilst remaining flexible (Hindley, 2015). Previous research reinforces that guidance is not intended to replace tailored support from the EP (Hindley, 2015; Prestidge, 2022) instead it should provide senior leaders with autonomy and prevent them from feeling overwhelmed as they will be aware of some of the processes to follow. In contrast to the studies exploring EP perspectives which highlighted the importance of training on CI processes (Bennett et al., 2021; Prestidge, 2022) participants did not view this to be beneficial and instead felt learning from the experience was much more beneficial.

Participants also considered the benefits of having an overview of the role of the EP and the support they could provide to schools, as not all participants were aware that the EP team could support with CIs. This reinforces the lack of clarity around the role of the EP supporting a CI and can lead staff to feel confused about what support is available and how they can access it (Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020; Silver, 2014). Thus reinforcing the importance of EPs contracting expectations with schools and providing clarity around what the offer is from the EPS in supporting with a CI.

One participant shared that although the school had access to CI protocols and an emergency plan, the contact details for EPs and other professionals working at the council had not been updated. This made it challenging as they were dealing with the CI whilst trying to secure the correct information to contact the EP. Similar research findings in previous studies showed CI guidelines were often not kept up to date with organisational changes and current research evidence (Dunne, 2021; Hindley, 2015).

5.3.2. Finding our tribe

In addition to further support with the CI process, participants also considered the benefit of receiving support from specialist services related to grief and bereavement to develop their own knowledge and skills (Morgan, 2020; Prestidge, 2022).

Research supports the benefits of schools adopting a proactive approach to CIs by ensuring staff have sufficient skills and training to support the school community and through collaborating with bereavement organisations (Holland, 2016). Participants also considered the benefits of developing networks with other senior leaders and mental health professionals, recognising the importance of sharing specialist knowledge. Previous research highlighted the importance of EPs providing support at the 'exosystem' level of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological framework. This involved recommending support networks and accessing specialist knowledge to strengthen the system around the CYP, such as the school community, teacher and families in helping to develop their resilience (Currie & Hayes, 2021; Slawinski, 2006).

Participants that received specialist support on grief and bereavement found it extremely beneficial to upskill their knowledge. One participant noted they had worked collaboratively with a specialist in bereavement for young people with learning disabilities and she is going to adapt one of the resources to use in their setting. This approach to working with external services and resources is extremely beneficial as rather than using external services to directly support the CYP, senior leaders are upskilling staff to support the CYP and school community directly. Previous research reinforces the importance of developing school staff skills and knowledge to enable them to provide nurture and support directly to the CYP following a CI (Holowenko, 2015).

Participants also discussed the benefits of developing networks for senior leaders to collaborate with other school leaders and other professionals such as mental health staff. Having opportunities to share case studies and examples of CI support from EPs that have worked well were suggested as being beneficial approach as a way of reassuring schools and knowing what support could be available. Similar findings were found in a study with EP participants, where EPs shared that they wanted the opportunity to share best practice and resources with colleagues in addition to developing supportive networks (Bennett et al., 2021). Participants also considered the benefits of having access to online resources on the local authority website such as weblinks or collaborative platforms such as Padlet where school leaders and staff could access information and share resources. Access to an online platform would also counter some of the earlier challenges mentioned by participants in relation to CI information not being kept up to date or contact details being incorrect. This is supported by previous research which focused on the development of an online

resource to support school staff and EPs to improve preparedness for CI response (Dunne, 2021; Dunne et al., 2022). However as there was no evaluation, it is uncertain whether this specific resource was found to be beneficial.

5.3.3. Let's go back and follow up

Participants also shared the importance of having follow-up support subsequent to the CI, discussed in the subtheme 'Let's go back and follow up' which is part of the wider theme 'We are always at the end of the phone'. Some participants discussed that they contacted the EP service for follow-up support for example, to support with funeral arrangements, however they were unsure if this was part of the process. Therefore, they felt that having follow up supervision and support would be beneficial to support both emotionally and practically. Previous research supported the benefit of follow up support due to the EP providing the initial support to the school following the CI (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024). Participants also discussed the benefits of receiving follow-up support during the anniversaries related to the CI and felt it would be beneficial if EPs contacted the school to provide a check in around key dates (Costelloe et al., 2020).

Many participants throughout the theme 'You're keeping everyone calm' shared that their priority was to focus on supporting their staff and school communities and therefore they did not have time to focus on their emotions, leading to an emotional delay (Blanchette, 2024; Morgan, 2020). This is due to staff not having time to process their emotions immediately after the CI, resulting in their emotions being processed at a later time (Blanchette, 2024). Consequently, participants felt it would be beneficial to receive follow-up supervision at a later time when they have

processed the event and they are ready to discuss their feelings, this is supported by previous research (Beeke, 2021; Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020). Earlier studies have shown that when follow-up support was provided school staff found it helped them to process and cope with the CI, enabling them to draw on their own strengths and improve their ability to respond to the CI (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024).

5.4. Summary

This study explored school staff experiences of the EP response following a CI. Findings from three of the themes, 'Having a safety net', 'A specialist in the area', and 'We are always at the end of the phone' align with previous research from school staff perspectives (Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020). The themes highlight the value of EPs in supporting with emotional containment (Blanchette, 2024; Costelloe et al., 2020) and practical psychological support (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). Participants valued EPs developing trusted relationships over time and receiving regular check ins, aligning with Bion's (1983, as cited in Costelloe et al., 2020) theory of containment and Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological theory. This reinforces the importance of having supportive systems at the 'macrosystem' to support both CYP and staff (Atwell, 2017; Costelloe et al., 2020; Dyregrov, 2008; Morgan, 2020). Participants also valued EPs psychological knowledge of grief and trauma and receiving tailored support such as scripts or letter templates (Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Silver, 2014).

A stronger emphasis in this study compared to previous studies were the participants need for autonomy, outlined in the theme 'We can almost run on our own'. Participants valued being empowered to lead the CI response, drawing on internal resources and experience, whilst EPs provided support in the background. This approach enabled staff to develop their knowledge and skills, resilience and preparedness for future CIs, facilitating PTG.

School staff also highlighted the need for clear CI plans, specialist training around grief and bereavement, support networks and follow up support from EPs. These findings reinforce the importance of an EP approach that balances both emotional support at the macro systems level with capacity building at the macrosystem level, enabling school leaders to respond independently and confidently. Furthermore, it aligns with SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) by supporting staff needs through competence, autonomy and relatedness in responding to CIs.

5.5. Implications for EPs

As outlined in the previous section, the research findings indicate that EP support to schools following a CI should be understood through the dual lens of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological model and the Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Bronfenbrenner's (2005) framework remains central to the support that EPs and school staff can provide or facilitate at each level of the school system. However, the approach adopted by the EP significantly influences senior leaders' skills, motivation levels and confidence in responding to CIs. For instance, an expert led approach may result in the EP becoming the decision maker, thus impacting on the relationships and communication at the different layers of the framework and developing a dependency on the EP (Blanchette, 2024). This may also lead to a strong reliance on referrals to external agencies, rather than upskilling school staff to build capacity. This can result in senior leaders losing a sense of control, leading to feelings of helplessness (Holland, 2016). Therefore, it is important that EPs empower school leaders to take a sense of control and to develop coping strategies and skills to increase levels of competency, resilience and to promote autonomy. Through facilitating supportive social connections and a wider sense of belonging, it can also support their need for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

To support this understanding, the author has developed a framework which combines both Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological framework and the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) alongside the participants' perspectives (See Figure 4). The evidence-informed framework provides EPs with a structured approach that moves beyond reactive or expert-led responses. Instead, it focuses on building sustainable

capacity, emotional resilience and autonomy within school systems, both in preparation for and in response to CIs.

Frameworks are widely recognised as valuable tools for providing structured and adaptable models that support the evidence-based implementation of services (Kelly et al., 2017). To guide the implementation of the framework, Meyers et al. (2012) outline four key phases in the Quality Implementation Framework:

- **Phase one:** The EPS should start by evaluating current practices, assessing organisational readiness, and identifying key stakeholders across schools, EPS and the LA.
- **Phase two:** Establish clear roles and responsibilities, deliver training, and build a supportive implementation team within the EPS and across the school system.
- **Phase three:** Provide ongoing supervision, monitor implementation of the framework, and adjust the framework based on ongoing feedback from stakeholders.
- **Phase four:** Evaluate the impact of the framework, gather insights from practice and use findings to refine and sustain the framework over time.

To enhance the frameworks relevance and effectiveness, future research should explore its practical implementation and adaptability. This includes evaluating how well it meets the needs of school leaders, school communities and wider stakeholders. Further research capturing the perspectives of a broader range of staff such as pastoral teams and teachers, as well as families would help to ensure the

framework is inclusive and fit for purpose. By adopting this framework, EPs can empower SLT to respond to CIs with increased confidence, resilience and a more equitable approach to psychological support across LAs.

It is also important for EPs to adopt and promote culturally sensitive practices that align with the framework. This includes using culturally affirming language, adapting support to reflect cultural or religious norms, and recognising diverse expressions of emotion and resilience (HCPC, 2023). In addition, EPs can support schools by providing guidance on inclusive approaches, facilitating staff training on cultural responsiveness and helping to build trusted, collaborative relationships with families from diverse communities.

Figure 4: Educational Psychology support for school leaders following a CI (developed by the author)

Combined framework of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological model and Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017)

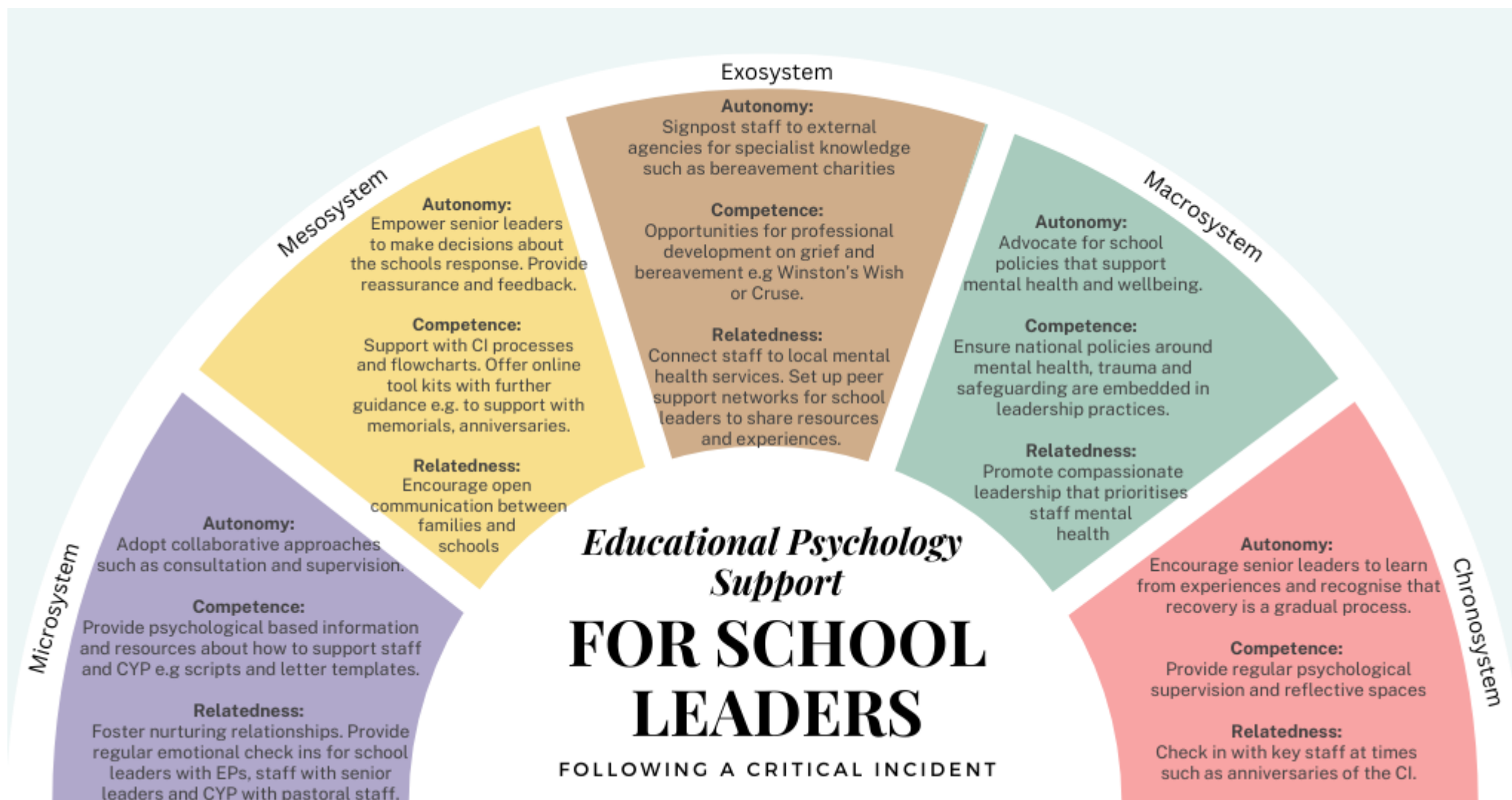


Table 8: Implications for EPs

Level of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological framework	Implications for EPs
Microsystem	<p>Autonomy</p> <p>Within the “Bounce ideas” subtheme, participants valued consultation-based approaches with EPs, enabling them to ask informal questions and receive practical, responsive advice (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014).</p> <p>They also valued the reassurance provided by EPs that were providing appropriate support to the school community. This reassurance helped to contribute to the development of autonomy and a sense of ownership, as discussed in the “We are on the right path” subtheme (Hindley, 2015; Prestidge, 2022; Silver, 2014).</p> <p>Competence</p> <p>Participants valued EPs psychological knowledge in supporting communication and underpinning the CI, approach as highlighted in the “Psychological knowledge” subtheme (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Silver, 2014). The “Providing us with a script” subtheme also emphasises the importance of EPs in supporting to communicate effectively with the school community, including support with scripts and letter templates (Brennan, 2021; Hindley, 2015; Silver, 2014). Participants also appreciated EPs</p>

	<p>specialist knowledge in SEN/ALN and multiple learning disabilities, which ensured that personalised support could be provided in response to individual needs following a CI.</p> <p>Relatedness</p> <p>The “You’re keeping everyone calm” subtheme illustrates how EPs are well placed to provide emotional support and containment to senior leaders. This helps to develop their resilience and ability to support the rest of the school community. Pastoral teams were identified as being well suited to support CYP due to their existing relationships and knowledge and skills in emotional wellbeing (Atwell, 2017). This aligns with existing literature that highlights the importance of EPs adopting a systemic approach to supporting and containing the school system (Costelloe et al., 2020).</p> <p>The subtheme “The relationship with school is key” further outlines that participants valued the development of long term relationships with EPs and the school community based on an element of trust (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020).</p>
Mesosystem	<p>Autonomy</p> <p>In the “Having them in the background” subtheme, participants shared the value of EPs providing background support, including checking in to ensure they were providing the appropriate support. Participants also appreciated being empowered to make autonomous decisions and personalise their response to the CI (Beeke, 2021).</p> <p>Competence</p> <p>Participants shared the importance of having a clear plan such as a flowchart or processes to follow at the start of the CI</p>

	<p>response, as reflected in the “I know there is a plan for this” subtheme. This was seen as beneficial in providing structure and guidance whilst also providing flexibility (Hindley, 2015). Participants also identified a need for a clear overview of the support available from the EPS so they would be aware of what support they would receive. For future CIs this could include reference to the proposed EP Support for School Leaders Framework (Figure 4).</p> <p>Relatedness</p> <p>In the “The relationship is key” subtheme, participants also shared the importance of EPs developing strong relationships with CYP and their families. Participants shared that the relationships helped to promote a sense of safety and help CYP and families to feel listened to and reassured following the CI (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020). Therefore, it will be important that EPs continue to nurture these relationships and promote open communication between families, schools and wider systems.</p>
Exosystem	<p>Autonomy</p> <p>Participants valued working directly with external specialist services, particularly those specialising in bereavement and grief. They emphasised the importance of developing their own knowledge and skills rather than referring CYP directly to external services. This viewpoint, reflected in the “Finding our tribe theme” subtheme, aligns with previous studies. Senior leaders recognised the benefits of adopting a proactive approach to CIs by working collaboratively with organisations such as bereavement charities to develop resources, knowledge and build capacity within the school (Holland, 2016).</p>

	<p>Competence</p> <p>Within the subtheme “Finding our tribe”, participants valued receiving training from specialist services related to grief and bereavement, enabling them to better support the school community (Morgan, 2020; Prestidge, 2022). Upskilling school staff was recognised as being significantly more valuable than relying solely on external professionals to directly support CYP, due to existing relationships and the opportunity to develop autonomy (Holowenko, 2015).</p> <p>Relatedness</p> <p>Participants valued the support from external specialist services related to grief and bereavement (Costelloe et al., 2020). The “Finding our own tribe” subtheme, also demonstrated the benefit developing networks to collaborate with other senior leaders and professionals such as mental health practitioners. The collaborative relationships also provided the opportunity for shared experiences and mutual support.</p>
Macrosystem	<p>Autonomy</p> <p>In the “Gift of normality” subtheme, participants outlined the importance of drawing on the diverse skills of school staff and re-establishing school routines as quickly as possible to support the wellbeing of the school community. It will also be important for EPs to support the implementation of mental health and wellbeing support of CYP in school policies, in line with government policies (DfE, 2023a; WG, 2021).</p> <p>Competence</p>

	<p>Participants discussed the wide range of expertise within school staff, including pastoral support and mental health first aiders as part of the “Gift of normality” subtheme. This aligns with government guidance in England (DfE, 2023a) and Wales (WG, 2021) which recommends that schools appoint a designated senior lead for mental health and wellbeing to oversee a whole school approach. EPs are well placed to support school leaders with embedding mental health guidance and national policies into leadership practices due to their psychological knowledge and experience in trauma informed practice (BPS, 2017; HCPC, 2023; Lowther, 2023).</p> <p>Relatedness</p> <p>Participants highlighted the wide range of knowledge and skills that staff possess in the “Gift of normality” subtheme, this included having mental health first aiders and pastoral staff. Implementing whole school support for mental health and wellbeing is recognised as an important protective factor for staff and children’s wellbeing following a CI (Donnelly & Rowling, 2007). Therefore, it is essential for EPs to promote such approaches within schools following a CI. Arguably, something many EPS’ strive to do.</p>
Chronosystem	<p>Autonomy</p> <p>In the “We learned a lot” subtheme, participants shared increased preparedness for future CIs. This is due to familiarising themselves with the process, leading to reduced reliance on the EP and increased confidence to manage situations independently (Atwell, 2017; Silver, 2014).</p>

	<p>The “Let’s go back and follow up” subtheme highlighted the importance of follow up supervision after the CI. This would provide an opportunity for senior leaders to process and reflect on their experiences, possibly promoting positive psychological change leading to PTG (Meyerson et al., 2011 as cited in Atwell, 2017).</p> <p>Competence</p> <p>The “Check in” subtheme highlighted the importance of receiving regular informal supervision. Participants found the sessions beneficial as they provided emotional containment, reflective practice and the opportunity to ask informal questions, which helped to provide reassurance and develop confidence (Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Hindley, 2015; Lockhart & Woods; Silver, 2014).</p> <p>The “Gift of normality” subtheme emphasised the value of peer supervision and peer support amongst senior leaders. Participants also considered the benefits of creating networks to share experiences and resources with other senior leaders. Providing regular opportunities for group supervision and group reflection would also be beneficial to reflect on the process and share experiences (Costelloe et al., 2020).</p> <p>Relatedness</p> <p>Within the “Let’s go back and follow up” subtheme, participants shared the importance of having continued support following the CI. This included guidance around funeral arrangements or anniversaries. They also felt it would be beneficial to receive follow-up supervision once they have processed the event and</p>
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	felt ready to discuss their emotions (Beeke, 2021; Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020).
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5.6. Strengths, limitations, and future research

5.6.1. Strengths

The current study recruited eight senior leaders from a range of secondary, primary and specialist schools from eight different LAs across England and Wales. Each LA employed its own model of CI response, resulting in a rich data set due that captured a breadth of different experiences and approaches to CIs shaped by varying models and contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The participants also provided detailed and comprehensive perspectives which aligned well with the studies aims and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). By recruiting senior leaders, the experiences, and perspectives of participants focused primarily on a systems level, enabling participants to reflect on EP support at all levels of the school system, rather than providing an individual perspective. This allowed for a more-in-depth exploration of systemic support.

A qualitative design using semi-structured interviews, was chosen to align with the researcher's epistemological and ontological stance, enabling participants perceptions and experiences to be explored in depth (Braun & Clarke, 2013a). Furthermore, the use of a RTA approach enabled the researcher to identify focused patterns and themes, enabling a clear yet rich presentation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The author also used the 20 questions from the 'Tool for evaluating TA manuscripts for publication' (Braun & Clarke, 2020) to assess the RTA research quality throughout the research process. Reflecting on the questions during supervision enabled the author to discuss potential problems related to the quality of the research throughout the research

process. Whilst also embracing the research subjectivity and its role in the process of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

5.6.2. Limitations

The online approach to interviews enabled for a wider range of CI models of response to be explored due to recruiting participants from a wider geographical area. However, due to the sensitive nature of the interviews, there were less opportunities to develop the rapport with the participant at the start of the interview (King et al., 2019). To overcome this challenge, the author provided an introduction at the start of the interview, providing reassurance and reminding participants that they could stop the interview at any time, turn their camera off or have a break (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Recruiting senior leaders (headteachers, deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers) was a strength of the research as it provided a focused exploration at the systems level. However, other staff perspectives such as class teachers and pastoral staff would have provided a broader range of perspectives and experiences to explore alongside the senior leaders' views.

5.6.3. Suggestions for future research

Whilst similar findings were shared amongst participants, senior leaders from specialist schools specifically valued EPs that had an existing relationship with their wider school community. They also shared the importance of EPs knowledge of CYP with SEN/ ALN

and multiple learning difficulties in recognising how best to support more vulnerable members of the school community. This was highlighted in the 'Psychological knowledge subtheme'. Therefore, further research exploring the experiences and perceptions of school staff specifically working in specialist schools would be beneficial to gain a richer understanding of support they require. Especially given that it is possible there will be a higher incidence of CYP experiencing life limiting conditions.

Based on the analysis of participants responses the author has developed a framework for EPs to use to support schools following a CI. This incorporates both what participants expressed was helpful and what participants would like to experience in addition to the support they received. It would be beneficial for future research to focus on the implementation of the framework and its effectiveness so this can be adapted to meet the needs of school leaders and school communities (See Figure 4). Furthermore, future research exploring a wider range of school staff views including pastoral staff and teachers and the views of families would also be beneficial so that it can be considered in the framework to ensure the support meets the needs of all layers of the school community. Using a focus group to capture the variety of views would be beneficial, this would enable the focus for future research to be placed on what additional support may be beneficial to support school staff, families and CYP. Senior leaders may also be more supportive of school staff taking part if the focus is more on support than reflecting on their experiences.

5.7. Conclusion

This research develops on existing studies which explore school staff perspectives on the support they receive from EPs following a CI. Findings suggest that senior leaders benefit from a systemic EP approach that provides guidance, emotional containment and empowers them to take autonomous responsibility for the CI response. The author developed a framework combining Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological framework with the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017), outlining how EPs can promote autonomy, competence and relatedness to help school leaders develop the resilience and skills needed to support whole school recovery.

The framework reflects key themes from the study, this includes supporting emotional containment at all levels of the school system and the importance of developing strong relationships and reassurance. It emphasises the value of EPs psychological knowledge, particularly with supporting with communication and guiding the CI response. The framework also outlines the importance of EP availability for ongoing dialogue through supervision and empowering school leaders to lead the CI response with the support of the EP. Additionally, it also recognises the value of school leaders learning from experience and developing networks to share best practice and to develop their own skills and knowledge.

This study offers a unique contribution to the existing literature, with practical implications for EPs in supporting school-led approaches to CI response.

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Part Three

Major Research Reflective Account

Word Count: 6848

Part Three: Major Research Reflective Account

1. Overview

The Major Research Reflective Account will be presented in Part A: A Critical Account of the Research Practitioner and Part B: A Contribution to Knowledge and dissemination. It aims to provide a reflective and reflexive account of the research process and my journey and development as a research practitioner. The reflective account will be written in the first person to reflect my thoughts and beliefs, thus evoking my active participation in the research process (Trainor & Bundon, 2021).

2. Part Three A: A Critical Account of the Research Practitioner

2.1. Rationale for the Thesis and Inception

At the start of my Year 2 placement, I joined the Critical Incident (CI) Team within the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) which consisted of three Educational Psychologists (EP), three trainee EPs and two graduate psychologists. The team was led by a senior EP who was also my supervisor, she was responsible for making the initial contact with the school and providing the initial support over the phone following the CI. Half-termly CI meetings took place to keep the team updated on any new CIs and it provided time to discuss current CIs. Before attending a CI, the EPs attended a preparation meeting to discuss the CI and how they could best support the school community. The CI team also attended a half-termly EP debriefing session where we

discussed and reflected on the support, we had provided to the school community following a CI.

During the Autumn term of my Year 2 placement, I shadowed the support they provided to educational settings following a wide range of CIs. After experiencing a CI response which was extremely emotive, I started to reflect on the role of EPs and TEPs in supporting school communities following a CI. During the next supervision session, I reflected upon my observation that although school staff seemed to value the handouts and guidance, the most important support seemed to be providing emotional containment and providing them with a space to talk about their feelings. It was evident that CIs impacted school staff differently depending on the situation, their role, involvement and relationships with those involved to name but a few factors. I was also aware that every CI was different and therefore the support would provide and be tailored to the needs of the school community. It made me reflect that although we were trying our best to support the school staff, were we providing the support they wanted or indeed needed? Do EPs all use different approaches or is it the same? How do we know what support we should be providing? I started to explore some of the literature and much of the research focused on EP perspectives of what they viewed as important in supporting schools with very limited research on school staff perspectives. Consequently, for my thesis, I was passionate about exploring the views of this arguably underrepresented group within the literature further.

2.2. Literature Review

The process of conducting the literature review was the most difficult and time-consuming part of my research. I utilised the support of the Cardiff University Library Service to guide how to access relevant databases and to support with search terms. This was extremely beneficial and provided reassurance as I was worried about missing a key paper based on my search terms. Initially, whilst scoping for literature I used a wider range of terms such as 'school psychologist' in addition to 'Educational Psychologist' but I reduced my search terms to make them more specific and relevant to my research such as only wanting papers from the UK.

Initially, the search terms returned papers that were over 25 years old, however since the beginning of the century, the role of the EP in practice has changed. The role has developed from being the expert with a strong focus on individual assessments to adopting a more collaborative and facilitative approach through using a range of approaches such as consultation, assessment, intervention, research, and training (Fallon et al., 2010). Furthermore, EPs now work at the different levels of the system such as the organisational level by working with school leaders and school staff or groups such as working with groups of children or the family, in addition to working with the individual CYP (Fallon et al., 2010). Therefore, it was imperative to explore more current research over the past 10 years to reflect the general changes in EP practice, which may have impacted perceptions around the role of the EP in supporting schools following a CI. Therefore, within the semi-systematic narrative literature review, I only reviewed papers from the past 10 years.

During the literature search, I was surprised by the lack of guidance from government policy in England and Wales and from the BPS regarding the role of the EP supporting schools/ LAs in response to CIs. As supporting CIs is a well-established part of the EP role (Aucott & Soni, 2016; Beeke, 2011; Beeke, 2021; Bennett et al., 2021; Hayes & Frederickson, 2008; Lee & Woods, 2017; Lockhart & Woods, 2017; Posada, 2006), it reinforced the confusion discussed within the literature around what the role of the EP is in responding to and supporting following a CI. During the literature search, it also became apparent that the approach to managing CIs in schools differed between countries beyond the support provided by the EP. For example, in America, there were school psychologists that were based in the school, therefore their role differed considerably from the role of the EP in the UK. In many European countries, there were centralised national crisis response units such as the International Crisis Response Network offering national standardised guidance and specific training provided for EPs. Therefore, I chose to focus my literature review on research papers from the UK to explore current approaches and experiences that are specifically relevant to the research participants I would be recruiting and the schools I will be working with as a qualified EP. I found it extremely beneficial to allocate time at the start of my literature search to plan and formulate my inclusion and exclusion criteria whilst initially scoping the literature. This enabled me to familiarise myself with the literature and spend time revisiting and critically reflecting on the inclusion and exclusion criteria before finalising it (Siddaway et al., 2019).

I chose to separate my literature review into a contextual narrative review in Part One A and a semi-systematic narrative literature review in Part One B. I felt that it was important to provide a broader perspective of the research topic in Part A including exploration of defining a CI, the impact of CIs on school systems, relevant psychological theories and the role of the EP in supporting school systems following a CI. This enabled me to include grey literature such as government legislation and adopt a 'snowballing' approach to search subject-related websites and journals to minimise the risk of missing important papers that may not be included in the semi-systematic narrative review (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although narrative reviews can be considered to lack objectivity due to the researcher selecting papers that may support their position, I tried to maintain neutrality by providing a range of views (Green et al., 2006). Writing a narrative review also provided me with the opportunity to explore relevant psychological theories that I felt were pertinent to supporting schools in response to CIs that had not been considered in previous literature on CIs such as SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This provided an alternative psychological lens to CI response which highlighted the importance of promoting autonomy, competence and relatedness, to support individuals with feeling feel valued and empowered to take an active role in their recovery (Raeburn et al., 2024).

In addition to writing a narrative review, I also felt it was important to complete a semi-systematic narrative literature review in Part Two B to provide a critical appraisal of the existing literature and to make links between different studies on different topics to develop new ideas (Siddaway et al., 2019). I chose to use a semi-systematic narrative

review as some of the research is only available through professional bodies such as the BPS and not through the library databases (Wong et al., 2013). This approach enabled me to access articles that would not be included using a systematic review whilst ensuring the research process is transparent (Snyder, 2019). This approach enabled me identify themes, theoretical perspectives and challenges about EPs supporting schools following a CI (Snyder, 2019).

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidance was also used to support the transparency of the literature review (Page et al., 2021). I found this extremely useful to create a table of search terms (Appendix 1) and a PRISMA diagram (Appendix 2) to record my decision-making throughout the process, such as why some papers were excluded during the screening process, thereby supporting my reflexive practice.

2.3. Quality Appraisal

Whilst carrying out my literature review I chose to use the CASP checklist (Singh, 2013) (Appendix 3) to evaluate the qualitative research papers and to support consistency as each paper was reviewed. This provided a structured and systematic approach to assess the study's strengths and weaknesses to support the quality of the research. I also chose to use the MMAT (Hong et al., 2018) (Appendix 3) to evaluate the mixed methods research. Although there was some slight variation in terms of quality and rigour, all 12 papers remained in the semi-systematic narrative review.

Surprisingly, eight of the 12 papers from the semi-systematic narrative review were unpublished theses. Initially, I was concerned about the high portion of theses compared to published papers in my review. However, research suggests that unpublished theses can offer valuable insights and are appropriate for inclusion within literature reviews (Moyer et al., 2010). The large number of theses illustrates that CI is an area of interest among Trainee EPs, however this interest is not yet reflected in research produced by practicing EPs. I also felt reassured that the use of appraisal tools such as CASP (Singh, 2013) and MMAT (Hong et al., 2018) helped to ensure transparency and rigour within the studies (Coombs, 2017). By familiarising myself with a range of theses, it also provided me with the opportunity to reflect on how researchers approached their studies and wrote up their findings. This helped to shape my research approach and guide my thinking about how to present my research and communicate my findings in a clear and concise format to support practical dissemination (See Appendix 4).

Whilst critically appraising the existing literature, I also recognised the importance of maintaining a reflexive stance, that values subjectivity, contextual nuance and aligns with the qualitative research paradigm. Instead of aiming to produce an exhaustive review of the literature, I focused on providing a rich, contextualised, and nuanced examination of CI support, to develop on existing research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Functional reflexivity was important in reflecting on how research design, participants roles and the model of CI response shaped the research findings. Disciplinary reflexivity was also valuable to due to exploring research across Psychology, Education and

Mental health and reflecting on its relevance and application to CIs. Personal reflexivity also remained fundamental to consider how my values and experiences influenced the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

2.4. Research aims and research questions

When I initially started to engage in my literature review, only one study had specifically explored school staff's perspectives of the EP response or support following a CI.

Morgan's (2020) unpublished doctoral thesis, which explored secondary school senior leaders' experiences of CI response, however, this was conducted in one LA in Wales and focused on one specific CI model. As I progressed with my research, two additional studies were published at the end of 2024 that focused on school staff perspectives of the psychological support from EPs following a CI. As I was quite far along into my research process, I was initially concerned that my research may be very similar to these new contributions of research.

Blanchette's (2024) thesis explored primary school senior leaders' perceptions of support from the EPS following a CI, this was undertaken in two neighbouring LAs in England. The regional closeness may also have shaped participants perspectives around one or two specific local CI models. Alternatively, Hayes & Gaukroger (2024) employed a mixed methods design, placing a strong focus on phase one a quantitative approach which explored the impact of CI on school staff wellbeing. Their limited focus on participants' perspectives of the psychological and EP support did not include senior

leaders. This may have potentially narrowed the focus to individual perspectives rather than the systemic role of EPs.

I also found that accessing more relevant and up-to-date research in my literature review helped me to develop a greater understanding of where I needed to focus my research. This included recruiting participants from across a wider range of educational settings and from a wider range of LAs across England and Wales to explore their views and experiences of different CI response models and approaches.

Following the literature review, I initially considered focusing my research questions on the emotional support and containment received from the EPS, but on further reflection during supervision, I felt this would be too specific and there would be an assumption that all school staff valued emotional-based support. Therefore, I chose to keep my research questions broader to focus on school staff's experiences and perceptions of the support they had previously received from the EPS following a CI. I felt this question would enable school staff to reflect on their experiences and provide the opportunity for them to talk about the support that is important to them. I also felt it would be beneficial to explore their perceptions about what further support they would like to receive, to enable me to consider how the EPs response as a profession could be developed further. Keeping my research questions broader, prevented them from being leading and enabled me to gather as much nuance from my participants as possible, consistent with the exploratory purpose of the research (Willig, 2019).

Initially, I also discussed with my supervisor about recruiting EPs and school staff to explore perceptions from both sides. However, after some reflective discussions, I felt that the literature review provided a clear insight into EP perspectives, and it would be more beneficial to focus my research on the views of a wider range of school staff from different settings and different LAs.

2.5. Philosophical Assumptions and Qualitative Methodology

The research is rooted in a Critical Realist Paradigm and adopts a contextualist epistemology. Whilst this acknowledges a sense of truth that the CI exists, it also highlights the multiple layers of reality shaped by experience and context (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Adopting a critical realist orientation enabled exploration into how support from the EPS following a CI could be experienced differently between individuals. Furthermore, adopting a contextualism epistemology reinforced how a participant's 'truth' is influenced by the context it is developed (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Within which it argues that there is no single truth, it recognises that knowledge can be true in some contexts such as a CI occurring, thus aligning with critical realism and my own beliefs and values (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Due to my ontological and epistemological stance, I chose to adopt a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research aims to make sense of how individuals experience and view the world through sharing their perspectives, therefore aligning with my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

2.6. Positioning of the researcher

Throughout the research process, I found being part of the CI team helped me to develop a greater understanding of CI's by being able to observe some of the support provided to schools. This was extremely important in developing my awareness of some of the different types of CIs, so when I interviewed participants, I had a clearer understanding of some of the experiences they were sharing (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

However, it was important to reflect on my positioning throughout the process of conducting the research as a partial insider, due to my experience of supporting the EP team with the CI response (Greene, 2014). Being a partial insider meant that I had pre-existing knowledge of the context of the research and therefore I was more familiar with the research group I was studying, enabling the interaction to be more natural (Greene, 2014). Furthermore, as I already had a knowledge of CIs and a knowledge of working with school staff, I felt more at ease talking to the senior leaders, which helped them to also feel more at ease (Bell, 2005). Some critics of insider research argue that the perceptions of the insider researcher are narrowed as the research is too familiar and the researcher can make assumptions based on prior knowledge and experience (Greene, 2014). However, carrying out a reflexive thematic analysis relies on the researcher shaping their research, which will ultimately always be infused with some levels of subjectivity, similar to the participants, who will also bring their values, beliefs and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Researcher subjectivity can therefore be seen as a resource for research rather than a threat to be contained (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

Consequently, it was imperative that to do the best quality research, I needed to engage in ongoing reflexive practice throughout the research process through writing in my reflexive journal and through engaging in regular supervision (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Reflecting on my influence on the research process and decision making, helped to develop transparency, it also provided reassurance at each stage of the process as I spent time reflecting on how my decisions and values were shaping the research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For example, when reflecting with my supervisor about the recruitment strategy, I spent time reflecting on the impact of recruiting through PEPs which may influence which schools participate compared to recruiting online which would enable me to contact participants directly. However, recruiting online through social media did not align with my values as discussed further in Part 3 so after discussion and reflection I felt recruiting through PEPs was the most suitable approach.

2.7. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria of Participants

I spent some time reflecting with my supervisor on whether to only recruit one participant from each LA and whether this would be challenging to identify which LA each participant was from. I decided this would be most appropriate as each LA will have often have its own model of CI response, therefore I wanted to gain a broader range of views from experiencing a range of response models to develop a greater richness of data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

As previous studies often restricted recruitment participation by location, education setting or the specific role of school staff (Blanchette, 2024; Hayes & Gaukroger, 2024; Morgan, 2020), I initially aimed to keep my inclusion criteria as broad as possible to gain a greater range of perspectives and enhance the richness of data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). However, as recruitment progressed, my first few participants were senior leaders, this coincided with Blanchette (2024) and Hayes and Gaukroger's (2024) papers being published.

Whilst Blanchette (2024) focused on senior leaders, her research was limited to views based on one or two CI response models with neighbouring LAs. Hayes and Gaukroger (2024) recruited participants from a wider range of LAs but did not recruit senior leaders. Therefore, the unique contribution of my research was to explore senior leaders perspectives at a systemic level across a range of different schools settings experiencing a wide range of CI response models.

2.8. Recruitment strategy

Deciding on a recruitment strategy was one of my biggest challenges due to the sensitive nature of CIs. I initially considered conducting interviews in person and considered contacting LAs closest to my location first and then expanding out further. However, as I aimed to recruit one participant from each LA, this approach risked limiting the sample of participants to one geographical location. This would result in school staff perspectives focusing on one model of CI response. To enable a wider range of views and experiences of different CI response models I chose to carry out my

interviews online which meant I could reach a wider range of participants. This provided a wider breadth of views and experiences (King et al., 2019).

I reflected with my supervisor on the best approach to recruit my participants. The easiest approach would be to recruit via social media, however, I felt that as school staff were going to be reflecting on their experience of the EPs approach to the CI, it was felt more appropriate to recruit through the EPS. Furthermore, I felt the EPS would be aware of CIs in their area and as such would be able to direct the recruitment information for this study to relevant participants. This would ensure that the EPS were aware of the research and therefore were able to consent by agreeing to pass on the recruitment details to school staff. This provided further challenges that the EPS then became the gatekeeper, and I was reliant on them to forward the information to the schools. However, this approach aligned more with my values and remained transparent, and it was felt fit with the fact that the findings from the study will be disseminated to EPs to support their approach to future CIs. It is hoped that by involving them at the beginning of the study enabled me to discuss the aim of my research with them, with the aim of them being more open to reading and implementing some of the findings. I also felt that recruiting through the EPS would reduce the number of schools contacting me from the same LA or even senior leaders from the same school.

Initially, I felt the most appropriate way to contact all EPs was via the Chair of NAPEP Cymru and the Chair of NAPEP UK. A follow-up email was subsequently sent to both Chairs asking for them to reshare the recruitment information. Despite the follow up

email, only three participants were recruited. To support further recruitment, I emailed 94 PEPs from different LAs across England and Wales through research of LA websites that could fit the inclusion criteria. This was extremely time-consuming as I created a spreadsheet of all of the LAs in England and Wales, I then started to search the website for each LA to ensure they supported with CIs before I contacted them. The spreadsheet enabled me to identify who had been contacted and make notes on why some LAs were not contacted, for example where some LAs had no information about CIs on their website. Some LAs also had very limited information about the EPS such as what services they provide or up to date contact details. This made it extremely challenging and time-consuming trying to source the correct information. However, I felt the personalised approach was more effective and I had a good response rate from EPs saying they had shared my information. However, some EPS' reported that one of their schools was interested but unfortunately, I did not receive any communication from the school, even after following up with the EPS. The hardest challenge was not being able to follow up directly with schools and feeling like I was adding additional pressure to EPs by sending them follow-up emails. Initially, I was hoping to complete the interviews before Christmas, due to the busy period at schools, I completed two interviews on the week back after Christmas.

I recruited eight senior leaders from primary, secondary and specialist schools, across eight different LAs. This provided an information rich dataset due to the variety of experiences and views shared by participants (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Whilst I initially was hoping for a broader range of school staff, participants shared concerns about the

sensitive nature of the CI, and preferred that staff did not revisit their experiences again. However, after collecting and analysing the data, I found it extremely beneficial that all participants were senior leaders as this enabled me to focus my research at the systems level and consider all layers of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological framework. The discussions focused on supporting the school system at all levels. The senior leaders preference to participate over school staff may have reflected the role EPs have at the systemic level , as they are often the primary point of contact with the school for CI response.

2.9. Data Collection

I chose to use semi-structured interviews to gather data as they aligned with my research aims and they can be useful for exploring participants' perceptions and constructions in depth, particularly when they have a personal interest in the subject (Braun & Clarke, 2013). My preference for carrying out interviews over using focus groups was due to wanting to gain more in-depth reflections and constructions of individual experiences rather than shared perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I also felt that due to the sensitive and highly confidential nature, some school staff may not want to discuss their experiences with others and may want to remain anonymous.

As the interviews were online and were of a sensitive nature, I felt it was important to spend some time developing a rapport with participants and to adopt an informal discussion approach (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I provided an introduction at the start of the interview which including outlining my interest in the topic and explaining the format of

the interview, providing reassurance that the participants could turn their cameras off, have a break or finish the interview at any point. Pinto et al., (2022) supports the importance of researchers being transparent with participants when researching sensitive topics so they feel comfortable to share their perspectives and recognise the implications it may have for participants by talking openly about their experiences. This also led me to reflect on the emotional impact for the participants and being able to refer participants to professional support services if they become emotional or upset. This was an important ethical consideration, which led to a range of support services being shared with participants during the debrief and included on the debrief form (See Appendix 12).

To maintain a continuous flow of discussion, questions were asked to provide further clarity or to provide further detail to encourage in-depth responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Therefore, I developed an interview schedule to provide a structure and some consistency across interviews, it also provided a flexible approach enabling participants to discuss topics that were important to them (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I was reluctant to have too many prepared questions as I wanted the participant to lead the conversation through their reflections. Therefore, careful consideration was given to my research questions, and I referred to guidance from Robson and McCartan (2016) to support with constructing the interview schedule by including introductory rapport building questions, direct questions and further suggested probing questions. The interview schedule helped me to feel more prepared and enabled me to explore some responses in more depth by responding with further questions. It also provided an opportunity to develop

the conversation by encouraging the participant to reflect on other areas that they may not have considered, such as what further support would be beneficial. Although my own beliefs, values and body language may have influenced the interview, using a semi-structured approach enabled more thorough engagement in the research area (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Furthermore, engaging in continuous reflection and reflexivity during supervision enabled me to question my own assumptions and remain curious throughout the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I also reflected on the impact of video recording my interviews with my supervisor and felt audio recording the interviews and using the transcript function on Microsoft teams would feel less intrusive and anxiety provoking for the participants due to the sensitive nature of the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005)

2.10. Data analysis

I chose to use Braun and Clarke's six stage Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to analyse the data due to its flexibility and exploratory nature (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is also compatible with analysing semi-structured interviews using a critical realism contextualism paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2020). I felt it was important that the data analysis allowed for nuance, breadth and depth to be developed and not feel like it was too constrained. To ensure it remained reflexive throughout, I reflected and made notes after each interview to then explore key areas during supervision. Braun and Clarke (2022) discuss that the data analysis starts during data collection, I felt this was pertinent and having my interviews spaced out enabled me to reflect and familiarise myself more with the data over time in preparation for coding my data.

I decided to complete the data coding by hand as I felt that I wanted to immerse myself in my data which I feel I was able to do. By the time I came to coding my data, I already felt like I was familiar with it due to reflecting on it in-between interviews. However, one of the challenges I came across was reaching a point where I felt the data was good enough (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I continued to reflect on my subthemes, and I finally moved a couple of my subthemes (Appendix 20 and 21) and it felt that whilst my themes had individual strands they also came together to develop a singular whole (Braun & Clarke, 2022). However, it was important to recognise that reflexivity is never final and there are always new or different ways of understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

I also found it essential to engage in regular supervision throughout the analysis to make sense of the data and verbalise my thoughts out loud to ensure it related to my research questions. I found it extremely beneficial having space to reflect and then looking at my data to provide me with time to process my thoughts. Through regular supervision, it enabled me to remain reflexive and continue to question my assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Due to my philosophical standpoint, I did not set out to find a truth but more a collection of views that might enable EPs to support school staff further following a CI. Therefore, my biggest challenge was to ensure everyone's views were captured so one perspective was not more important than another, but that experiences were collectively understood.

I chose to use an inductive approach to the data analysis to enable codes and themes to be developed from the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I also coded the data to explore the meaning of participants responses at both the semantic and latent level which was important to gain a richer meaning. Throughout the coding phase of the analysis, I continuously reflected on the codes I created. However afterwards I felt some of the codes were too broad and therefore benefited from having both the code and original quote next to it so I could go back and adjust the code. Although this took time, the codes became more specific and relevant which ultimately supported me when developing the themes. My approach to coding the data developed through discussions with my supervisor and constant reflection was made back to my research questions to ensure the data and codes remained relevant. I found it valuable to put the codes under four key themes initially so I could start to construct initial themes. I was able to construct themes which therefore developed rather than emerged through sorting the codes into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I also created a map to share my themes to ensure they were clear and focused.

The author developed theme names using quotations from the data to provide an immediate and clear sense of each theme, whilst remaining grounded in the language from the data and concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As a reflexive practitioner, the author engaged deeply with the phases of RTA, adopting an inductive approach that involved clustering codes and developing and refining themes. This sustained immersion in the data ensured that the theme names reflected shared patterns of meaning centred around a core organising concept (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Rather than

using quotations arbitrarily, the author felt that the theme names captured the essence and scope of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Before deciding on using RTA, I spent some time researching around using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2021). However, IPA is typically carried out with a homogenous smaller group, this would have limited the range of participants from different school settings and roles. Furthermore, IPA incorporates a dual analytical focus by using an idiographic approach focusing on the unique details of each participant and thematic orientation, identifying themes across participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This places a strong focus on analysing each participant before identifying themes across participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, I felt RTA was more appropriate as I did not aim to adopt an idiographic approach, alternatively, I wanted to code my data, develop themes and generate outcomes about EPs and School staff that could be shared in a clear and concise format to support with implementation (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Willig, 2013). Furthermore, I wanted participants to reflect on the support from EPs at the different levels of the system which involved talking about how EPs supported CYP, school staff and families in response to a CI. However, it would not have been appropriate to discuss the experiences of others when using an IPA approach (Spiers & Riley, 2019).

3. Part Three B: Contribution to Knowledge and Dissemination

3.1. Unique contributions of the research

As discussed in part two of the thesis there is limited research from the perspectives of school staff on the support, they received from an EP following the CI. The current study recruited participants from eight different LAs across England and Wales from a combination of secondary, primary and specialist schools which provided a breadth of different experiences and approaches to CIs, in comparison to previous research.

Each LA employed its own model of CI response, resulting in a rich data set due that captured a breadth of different experiences and approaches to CIs shaped by varying models and contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The participants also provided detailed and comprehensive perspectives which aligned well with the studies aims and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This contrasts with previous research on school staff perspectives such as that by Morgan (2020) and Blanchette (2024), which focused on one or two specific models of response. Another study, Hayes and Gaukroger (2024) used a mixed-methods approach, potentially reducing the richness of the data.

Exploring perspectives from a range of school settings also responds to prior recommendations that further research should focus on gathering the views of school staff from a wider range of settings such as specialist provisions (Blanchette, 2024). Senior leaders were recruited for this study as they are typically the primary point of

contact with the school for CI. This provided consistency across participants roles in the various school settings.

A qualitative design using semi-structured interviews, was chosen to align with the researcher's epistemological and ontological stance, enabling participants perceptions and experiences to be explored in depth (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, the use of RTA approach enabled the researcher to identify focused patterns and themes, enabling a clear yet rich presentation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The theme 'We can almost run on our own' reflects how internal support systems within the school, alongside the systemic and collaborative approach of EPs facilitated autonomy and empowered participants to lead the CI response with the support of EPs. The study offers a unique contribution to the existing literature by providing a different psychological lens to underpin the CI approach. The research findings and recommendations for EPs are grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological framework and the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017), providing a conceptual framework that EPs can use to support schools effectively (See Figure 4).

The framework outlines the support that EPs could provide or facilitate to promote autonomy, competence and relatedness to ensure school leaders develop the resilience and skills to support the school community following the CI. The exploratory approach to the research did not aim to provide generalisability, but transferability to practice for readers such as EPs and school staff (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.2. Implications for EPs

The relevance of the current study to EPS, LAs and schools is discussed throughout Part A and B. The main aim for the research is to support EPS, LAs and schools to work collaboratively to implement the recommended framework (See Figure 4) into their policies and practices for responding to CIs. It is hoped that the framework will support a systemic approach to CIs and will enable EPs to provide a balance of support and autonomy to schools following a CI, both of which were identified during analysis as central themes. It also aligns with the collaborative and facilitative approach more recently developed by EPs in comparison to the expert role which supports capacity building (Fallon et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Furthermore, Sedgwick and Stothard (2021) suggest that EPs are not basing their practice on well-evidenced techniques and often use their professional practice and beliefs over research. Suggesting EPs are well positioned to develop practice-based evidence with schools and support with effective dissemination (Sedgwick & Stothard, 2021). Research by Blase et al., (2012) also highlights the importance of implementation science in facilitating organisational change. This will be an important consideration when disseminating the findings of this research.

3.3. Considerations for future research

As discussed in Part two, there are several important areas of focus that future research could develop. Whilst similar findings were shared amongst participants, senior leaders from specialist schools specifically valued EPs that had an existing relationship with their wider school community. They also shared the importance of EPs knowledge of

CYP with SEN/ ALN and multiple learning difficulties in recognising how best to support more vulnerable members of the school community. This was highlighted in the 'Psychological knowledge subtheme'. Therefore, further research exploring the experiences and perceptions of school staff specifically working in specialist schools would be beneficial to gain a richer understanding of support they require. Especially given that it is possible there will be a higher incidence of CYP experiencing life limiting conditions.

Based on the analysis of participants responses the author has developed a framework for EPs to use to support schools following a CI. This incorporated both what participants expressed were helpful and what participants would like to experience in addition to the support they received. It would be beneficial for future research to focus on the implementation of the framework and its effectiveness so this can be adapted to meet the needs of school leaders and school communities (See Figure 4).

Furthermore, future research exploring a wider range of school staffs' views including pastoral staff and teachers and the views of families would also be beneficial so that it can be considered in the framework to ensure the support meets the needs of all layers of the school community. Using a focus group to capture the variety of views would be beneficial, this would enable the focus for future research to be placed on what additional support may be beneficial to support school staff, families and CYP. Senior leaders may also be more supportive of school staff taking part if the focus is more on support than reflecting on their experiences.

3.4. Dissemination of findings

I feel that it is important that my research findings are disseminated to EPs, LAs and schools to support change in practice. Research shows that although an effective dissemination plan can develop awareness, understanding and a possible change in action at an individual level, it is often not enough to sustain change at the organisational level (Sedgwick & Stothard, 2021). Consequently, it is recommended that a two-pronged strategy is required to support success. Firstly, it is recommended having strong evidence base or either evidence-based practice or practice-based evidence. Secondly the use of evidence-based implementation strategies that promote the adoption and continuation of evidence-based practices to ensure change (Boyle & Kelly, 2017). This reinforces the importance of not only sharing the findings with EPs and schools but also with senior leaders in LAs and strategies for implementation as well as dissemination should be considered by the LA in their strategic plan to effect sustainable change (Sedgwick & Stothard, 2021).

Whilst recruiting participants and during interviews, both EPs and school leaders asked if I could share the research findings with them. I hope to develop a summary of my findings that will be easily accessed for future reference in addition to sharing the framework (Figure 4). I also hope to share my findings informally through discussions with other TEPs, EPs and school staff. In addition to disseminating my research I will also take the knowledge and skills that I have learnt throughout the process into my practice as an EP. The Dissemination plan outlined in Table 9.

Table 9: Dissemination Plan

Action	Initial steps	Timescale
Share research findings with participants	Create a summary of the study's findings and share with research participants via email.	September 2025
Share the findings with the EPS I will be working in from September	Create a presentation with a summary of the research findings and ways to support implementation to share with PEP and team.	August 2025
Share findings with NAPEP Cymru and NAPEP UK	Share a summary of the study's findings with the chair for NAPEP Cymru and NAPEP	September 2025
Join or develop a regional steering group on CI	Speak to PEPs and explore opportunities for joining or setting up a regional steering group	October 2025
Publish research in a peer-reviewed journal	Contact editors of relevant journals	January 2026

3.5. Personal reflection and summary

Conducting the research has reaffirmed to me the integral role of the EP in supporting school staff following a CI. It has also enabled me to reflect on the importance of the role of the EP becoming more defined to ensure the approach they take to support schools is underpinned by psychological theory and adopts a balance of emotional support and containment with developing autonomy as outlined in the research findings. It has also made me reflect on my own practice when I am a qualified EP and how the approach I use with schools is important to ensure I support positive outcomes. Whilst also reflecting on my personal and professional values against the BPS code of ethics, and the HCPC standards to ensure participants were treated with respect and compassion (BPS, 2021; HCPC, 2016).

Throughout the research process and writing up my thesis, I have developed a wide range of skills and knowledge and overcome a lot of challenges throughout the journey. I initially felt much more comfortable as a practitioner and less confident as a researcher. Throughout the process, there have been many feelings of conscious incompetence along the way. However, through extensive reading, reflection and supervision I have not only developed my research skills but also my confidence in the research process. It has helped to reinforce the importance of ensuring my practice is underpinned by psychological theory and either evidence-based practice or practice-based evidence to ensure it has a positive impact (Sedgwick & Stothard, 2021).

Therefore, recognising the importance of contributing to Educational Psychology research.

The reflective account enabled me to reflect on my research journey and the decisions I made along the way. This section hopes to complement part one and two of my thesis by providing more transparency to the research process and another lens from which to explore my research contributions. I have enjoyed reflecting throughout this section on my research journey and how much I have learnt. It has also made me realise how proud I am of my research and how it has helped to enhance my practice in preparation for becoming a qualified EP.

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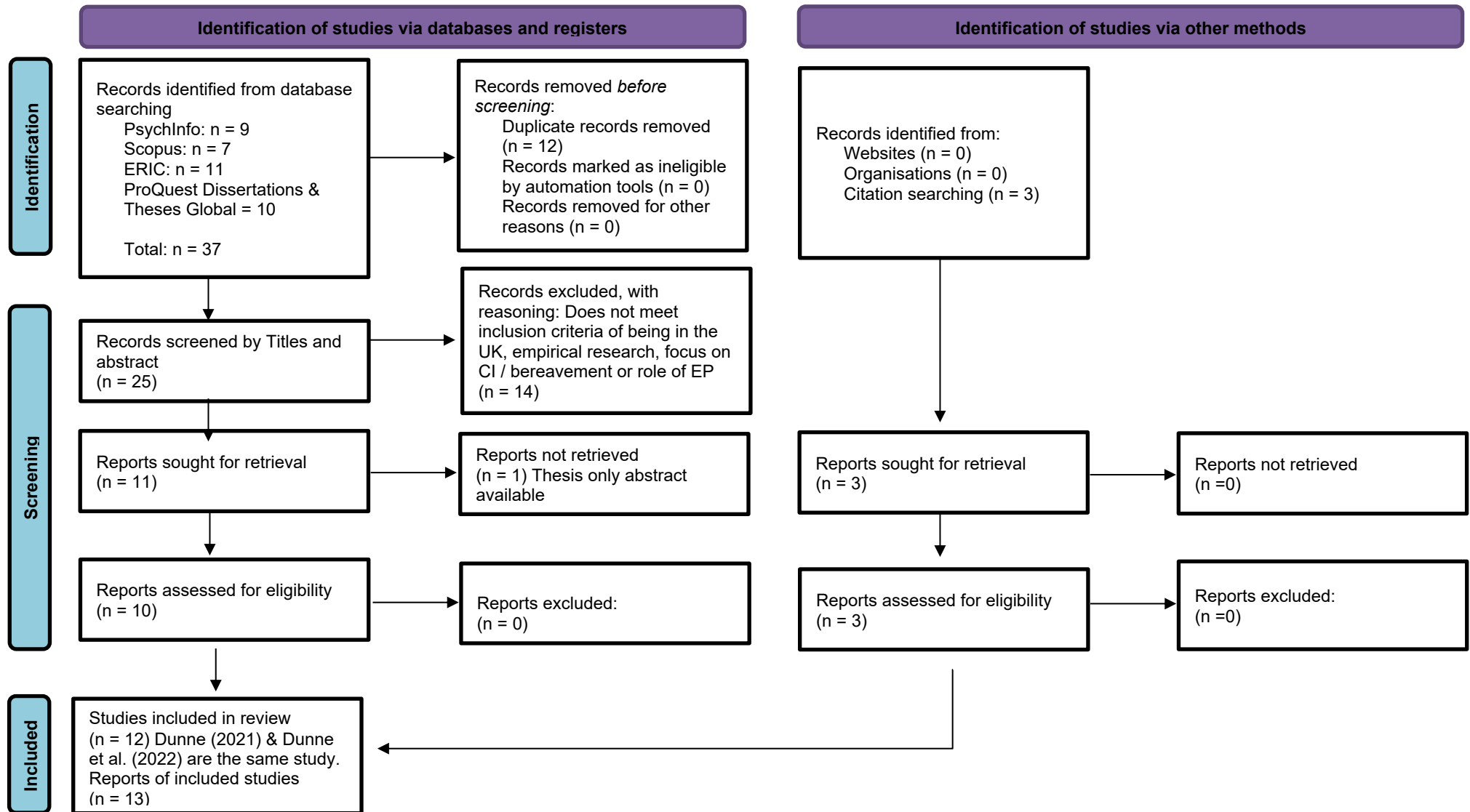
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5. Appendices

Appendix 1: Keyword search terms

Database	Search Terms	Total Returns
APA Psycinfo	<p>"critical incident*" OR "traumatic event" OR "major incident" OR "school crisis" OR "bereavement support" OR "school emergency" OR "crisis response" AND "School staff" OR "School" OR "Teacher*" AND "Educational Psycholog*"</p> <p>The search was filtered via the inclusion criteria of being published within 10 years of the current date. Peer-reviewed journals or Dissertation/ Thesis</p>	9
ERIC on Pro Quest	<p>"critical incident*" OR "traumatic event" OR "major incident" OR "school crisis" OR "bereavement support" OR "school emergency" OR "crisis response" AND "School staff" OR "School" OR "Teacher*" AND "Educational Psycholog*"</p> <p>The search was filtered via the inclusion criteria of being published within 10 years of the current date. Peer-reviewed journals or Dissertation/ Thesis</p>	11
Scopus	<p>"critical incident*" OR "traumatic event" OR "major incident" OR "school crisis" OR "bereavement support" OR "school emergency" OR "crisis response" AND "School staff" OR "School" OR "Teacher*" AND "Educational Psycholog*"</p> <p>The search was filtered via the inclusion criteria of being published within 10 years of the current date. Peer-reviewed journals or Dissertation/ Thesis</p>	7
Pro Quest Dissertations and Theses	<p>"critical incident*" OR "traumatic event" OR "major incident" OR "school crisis" OR "bereavement support" OR "school emergency" OR "crisis response" AND "School staff" OR "School" OR "Teacher*" AND "Educational Psycholog*"</p> <p>The search was filtered via the inclusion criteria of being published within 10 years of the current date. Peer-reviewed journals or Dissertation/ Thesis United Kingdom</p>	9

Appendix 2: PRISMA diagram (Page et al., 2021)



Appendix 3: Critical Appraisal of research articles in the semi-systematic literature review

Critical Appraisal Skills Programme – Qualitative Checklist (CASP; Singh, 2013) Responses: Yes, No, Can't tell, N.A										
Citation	Section A: Are the results valid? Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Section B: What are the results? Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear statement of findings?	Section C: Will results help locally? How valuable is the research?
Morgan (2020)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Silver (2014)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lockhart & Woods (2017)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dunne (2021)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dunne et al. (2022)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Costelloe et al. (2020)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Blanchette (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Prestidge (2022)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Atwell (2017)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT: Hong et al., 2018) Responses: Yes, No, Can't tell, N.A				
Citation	Hindley (2015)	Bennet et al. (2021)	Brennan (2021)	Hayes & Gaukroger (2024)
Screening questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there clear RQs? Do the collected data address the RQs? 	Yes Yes	Yes (but not explicitly stated). Yes	Yes Yes	Yes Yes
Qualitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the RQ? Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the RQ? Are the findings adequately derived from the data? Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data? Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis, and interpretation? 	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes
Quantitative RCTs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is randomisation appropriately performed? Are the groups comparable at baseline? Are there complete outcome data? Are outcome assessors blinded to the intervention provided? Did the participants adhere to the assigned intervention? 	Yes Yes Yes Can't tell Yes	Yes Yes Yes Can't tell Yes (some dropped out)	Yes Yes Yes Can't tell Yes	Yes Yes Yes Can't tell Yes
Quantitative non-randomised:				

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the participants representative of the target population? Are measurements appropriate regarding both the outcome and intervention (or exposure)? Are there complete outcome data? Are the cofounders accounted for in the design and analysis? During the study period, is the intervention administered (or exposure occurred) as intended? 	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>No (the geographical distribution of participants was skewed). Yes (although limited by a survey rather than interview)</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes (It was noted this may have been impacted by the start of Covid19).</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>(Partially, only females responded)</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p>
Quantitative descriptive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the RQ? Is the sample representative of the target population? Are the measurements appropriate? Is the risk of non-response bias low? Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the RQ? 	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Partially (only correlation rather than causation can be considered).</p>
Mixed Methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the RQ Are the different compounds of the study effectively integrated to answer the RQ Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and 	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>

quantitative components adequately interpreted?				
• Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
• Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Appendix 4: Articles included in the focused literature review

Authors and Reference	Country	Outline	Design and Methodology	Participant Information	Findings	Critique
Morgan, V., (2020) Critical Incidents and School Communities: Exploring experiences of senior school staff and the support of an Educational Psychology Service in Wales. Thesis (Doctorate). Cardiff University.	Wales	The Thesis explores the experiences of senior school staff following a CI. It also explores their perceptions of a model of preparation and response used by the EPS in one LA in Wales.	Qualitative design using semi structured interviews	Seven senior members of school staff from seven secondary schools across one LA	Key themes include: Staff experiences of CIs including the event, pressures, psychological impact, school system and post impact. Staff perceptions of the EP's model of preparation and response	The study only includes the perspectives of senior school staff from secondary schools and did not include the views of other members of staff or primary schools. The study focused on one specific model used within one LA.
Silver, L., (2014) Critical Incidents: A Local Authority Response. Thesis (Doctorate). Cardiff University.	Wales	The Thesis explores how three different agencies respond to a CI involving a suicide cluster in one LA in Wales.	Qualitative design using grounded theory and soft systems methodology to explore a single case study.	Six group interviews were conducted with a total of 21 participants. Four School counsellors, twelve school staff and Five Educational Psychologists	The grounded theory showed that different agencies responded differently to the CI reinforcing the need for improve coordination and collaboration. Findings showed the need for clear guidance, improved communication, support, and training. EPs need to be aware of the psychological impact of trauma on school communities and ensure the appropriate support is provided.	The study focuses on one specific type of CI (suicide cluster) rather than a range of CIs. Lack of in-depth review of school staff and EPs due to exploring the views of three different professionals.
Lockhart, C. F., & Woods, K. (2017). 'Exploring the development of critical	UK	The paper explores the inception, development and	Qualitative design, semi-structured paired interviews.	14 Educational Psychologists across seven	The main elements of psychological support from the CIRT teams included	The data was gathered from EP perspectives, limiting the

incident response teams', International Journal of School & Educational Psychology, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 243-254.		maintenance of CI response teams with LAs. The paper focuses specifically on the role of the EP within the CIRT team.		different LAs, one clinical psychologist, one senior teacher.	an initial telephone call or visit, debriefing or group work and letter templates. Research findings showed the challenges with maintaining and evaluating CIRTs which were due to the context, people and processes.	comprehensiveness of the data.
Hindley, K. (2015). Critical Incident Support to Schools: Educational Psychologists and the role of written guidelines. Thesis (Doctorate). Cardiff University	England and Wales	The Thesis explores the role of the EP in supporting schools following a CI. There is a specific focus on the production and use of written guidelines.	Mixed methods exploratory study consisting of two phases. Phase 1: Content analysis of written guidelines for CIs Phase 2: Semi structured interviews.	CI Guidelines from 30 LAs Eight Educational psychologists took part in phase 2.	Most CI guidelines provided information on accessing support, recommendations for response, resources and psychoeducation. Written guidelines were considered to be beneficial, however personal contact from EPs was still recognised as being essential to CI intervention.	The data was gathered from EP perspectives, limiting the comprehensiveness of the data.
Dunne, R., (2021) Educational Psychologist involvement with critical incident response. Thesis (Doctorate). University of Manchester.	UK – Northwest region	The research was commissioned with the aim of developing an online resource through a collaborative action research project.	Qualitative action research design following the RADIO model.	A task and finish group consisting of the researcher (Trainee EP) and five EPs from different EPS within the Northwest region using opportunistic sampling.	The 'Critical Incident Resource' was created through a collaborative process involving a task and finish group. The development of the resource highlighted important project management skills for EPs such as conceptual skills, human and negotiating skills and technical abilities.	The research was carried out in one region so the process may be more representative of that geographical location and experiences of CIs. The use of the online resource across different regions is unclear and would require further evaluation. Difficulty with recruiting school leaders during the evaluation and therefore further opportunities to gain


						feedback from this target audience would be beneficial.
Dunne, R., Woods, K., McCaldin, T., Atkiss, E., George, B., McDermott, H., ... & Taylor, R. (2022) 'Working collaboratively to create a legacy: the development of The Critical Incident Resource', Educational Psychology in Practice, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 20-36.	UK – Northwest region	The research was commissioned with the aim of developing an online resource through a collaborative action research project.	Qualitative action research design following the RADIO model.	A task and finish group consisting of the researcher (Trainee EP) and five EPs from different EPS within the Northwest region using opportunistic sampling.	<p>The 'Critical Incident Resource' was created through a collaborative process involving a task and finish group.</p> <p>The development of the resource highlighted important project management skills for EPs such as conceptual skills, human and negotiating skills and technical abilities.</p>	<p>The research was carried out in one region so the process may be more representative of that geographical location and experiences of CIs.</p> <p>The use of the online resource across different regions is unclear and would require further evaluation.</p> <p>Difficulty with recruiting school leaders during the evaluation and therefore further opportunities to gain feedback from this target audience would be beneficial.</p>
Costelloe, A., Mintz, J., & Lee, F. (2020) 'Bereavement support provision in primary schools: An exploratory study', Educational psychology in practice, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 281-296.	UK	The research explored how bereaved children are supported in primary schools. The research also explores how primary school staff are supported in responding to bereaved children.	Qualitative exploratory study using semi-structured interviews.	16 school staff took part in semi-structured interviews. Eight teachers, two ELSA's, two SENCOs, two assistant head teachers and a pastoral lead across 10 primary schools within one LA.	<p>Research findings show that providing emotional support to bereaved children can have a negative impact on the emotional wellbeing of school staff.</p> <p>Schools have an important role in supporting CYP with direct and indirect emotional support. Both have been identified as important parts of pastoral care.</p>	Small and opportunistic sampling may mean the study is representative of one specific local authority.

					Educational Psychologists are well placed to support school communities with bereavement support.	
Blanchette, O. (2024). Critical Incidents: How do primary school staff perceive Educational Psychology Services' critical incident support?	UK	The Thesis explores primary school staff's perceptions of the support they received from the EPS during CIs.	Qualitative design using semi-structured interviews.	Eight primary school staff, all senior leadership from two LAs.	<p>Research findings showed that primary school staff found EPs as experts and empathetic professionals who provided valuable, holistic support following a CI.</p> <p>There was a strong sense of community during the CI response, but school staff felt unqualified to deal with the CI without the support of EPs.</p> <p>Despite the initial EP response being praised, participants shared the need for longer term support due to delayed emotional reactions.</p>	Small and opportunistic sampling may mean the study is representative of two specific local authorities.
Bennett, J., Edwards, H., Finnegan, C., Jones, R., Carpenter, C., and Sargeant, C. (2021). Educational Psychologists' involvement in Critical Incidents: Self-efficacy and Influencing factors. Educational Psychology in Practice, 37(4). Pp430-447	UK	The paper explores factors that predict EPs self-efficacy in relation to CIs. The research also explores their perceptions of CI training.	Cross-sectional survey study	95 EPs from UK LAs	<p>Emotional intelligence, avoidant coping strategies and approach coping strategies were all identified as being significant predictors of EPs self-efficacy in dealing with a CI.</p> <p>The number of CIs an EP had supported with was not a significant predictor of their self-efficacy.</p> <p>Most EPs reported that they needed more training to support with CIs</p>	<p>The study was carried out during the Covid pandemic so the researchers notice this may have impacted on the participants experiences.</p> <p>Potential omission of relevant variables such as training from the regression table</p>

					including both knowledge based and experience-based training.	
Brennan, L. (2021). Providing support in a time of crisis: An investigation into how Educational Psychologists in the UK respond to death by suicide within the school community. (Thesis). Doctorate. University of Essex	UK	This Thesis investigates how EPs support schools following a death by suicide in the school community,	Mixed methods design. A national survey analysed using descriptive statistics and semi-structured interviews using a grounded theory approach.	76 EPs responded to the survey. 5 EPs were interviewed.	<p>The most common forms of support Eps provide to schools are face to face consultations and guidance on appropriate language around suicide.</p> <p>The findings showed that the most common forms of support that EPs receive are co-working with colleagues and individual debriefing.</p> <p>The grounded theory analysis resulted in 15 axial codes with the overarching theme 'containment across and within the system' when responding to a death by suicide.</p>	<p>Small sample size.</p> <p>The sensitive nature of the topic may make it difficult for some participants to discuss.</p>
Hayes and Gaukroger. Hayes, B., & Gaukroger, A. (2024). Critical incidents in schools: Staff wellbeing and perceptions of psychological support. Educational and Child Psychology, 41(2), 128–141.	UK (England)	<p>This paper explores the impact of CI on school staff wellbeing.</p> <p>It also explores school staffs views of the psychological support provided by EPs.</p>	<p>Mixed methods consisting of two phases.</p> <p>Phase 1: Quantitative phase involving an online survey with standardized measures (WHO-Five Wellbeing Index and Impact of Event Scale-Revised).</p> <p>Phase 2: A qualitative phase involving semi-structured interviews analysed using thematic analysis.</p>	<p>Phase one: Online questionnaire for school staff (47 school staff – 15 primary, 31 secondary, 1 pupil referral unit).</p> <p>Phase two: Semi-structured interview (7 school staff – 1 primary, 6 secondary).</p>	<p>Findings showed a significant negative correlation between the impact of the CI and staff wellbeing.</p> <p>The study showed a significant positive correlation between staff wellbeing and EP support</p> <p>Participants reported that they valued immediate and longer-term support from the EPS such as emotional containment, guidance on how to support CYP and</p>	<p>Small sample size and potential selection bias in the participants that chose to take part.</p> <p>The correlation analysis in the first phase does not allow for conclusions about causation.</p>

					developing confidence to respond to the CI.	
Prestidge, M. (2022). Needing to respond; Responding to need: A thematic analysis exploring Educational Psychologists' experiences of responding to critical incidents (Professional Doctorate thesis, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.	UK	This thesis explores EPs experiences of responding to CIs. It aims to explore what influences an EPs response to CI	Qualitative design, using semi-structured interviews	Three EPs from three LAs	<p>The study identified six key themes and 20 subthemes that outline the factors influencing how EPs respond to a CI.</p> <p>The themes include the CI, the EP, systems, factors impacting on the approach, responding to needs and the relational aspect, Post CI the bigger picture.</p>	Limitations include the small sample size and only including the perspectives of EPs
Atwell, A. (2017). An exploration of how schools cope psychologically with a critical incident considering support processes, with particular reference to decision-making regarding outside support, especially support available from a local authority Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT). Doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham.	UK	This paper explores how schools cope psychologically with a CI focusing on the decision-making process. It considers short-, medium- and long-term support strategies both at individual and whole school level.	Qualitative design, using semi-structured interviews and a thematic analysis.	Eleven senior leaders in schools in one LA. Six which had requested CIRT support and five which had not.	<p>The findings showed that schools coped psychologically through pastoral support for staff, CYP and families which reduced stress and supported whole school normalization.</p> <p>Schools that received additional support from the CIRT benefited from feeling more prepared.</p> <p>The decision to request external support was influenced by initial impact of the CI as well as the schools capacity to cope.</p>	The broad scope of the research aim which includes both psychological coping and decision making.

Appendix 5: Recruitment poster



**PARTICIPANT
RECRUITMENT**


‘Exploring the perceptions of school staff in relation to the Educational Psychology Service response they received, following a Critical Incident’

Are you a **teacher, senior leader** or a member of **pastoral staff** in a primary or secondary school?

Have the **Educational Psychologist team supported** the school following a **Critical Incident**?


If you answered ‘YES’ to the above questions and would like to participate in a 45-60 minute online interview via Microsoft Teams, please contact me on the **email address below** for further information.

One participant will be interviewed from each local authority to provide breadth of views.



My name is Laura, I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Cardiff University.

As part of my doctoral studies I am interested in hearing about school staff’s experiences and views of the Educational Psychology Service response following a Critical Incident.



Contact details
Laura Shaw
ShawLm@Cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix 6: Email to Gatekeeper (Chair of Professional Associations)



Date.....

To

Title of Research Project: Exploring the perceptions of school staff in relation to the Educational Psychology Service response they received following a Critical Incident.

My name is Laura Shaw and I am a second year Trainee Educational Psychologist, currently completing the Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) at Cardiff University. As part of my course, I am carrying out research for my thesis aimed at exploring schools staff experiences and views of the Educational Psychology Service response following a Critical Incident.

I am writing to enquire if you would be willing to support with participant recruitment in this research? The research seeks to interview pastoral support, teachers or senior leaders in Primary and Secondary school who have had previous involvement supporting a critical Incident in school. The school will also have received support from the Educational Psychologist Service prior to or following the critical incident. The research will involve taking part in a semi-structured interview via Microsoft Teams, this will take between 45-60 minutes where their experiences and views will be explored. One participant will be interviewed from each local authority.

I would be grateful if you could share the email including the recruitment poster outlining the purpose and process of the study with your members.

The research aims to develop an understanding of the current practices of support for school staff and future implications for practice. Ongoing supervision and support will be provided by Dr Rosanna Stenner who is a professional tutor at Cardiff University

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this research. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like any further information.

Laura Shaw

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 7: Email to Gatekeeper (Principal Educational Psychologist)



Dear Principal Educational Psychologist

My name is Laura Shaw and I am a third-year Trainee Educational Psychologist, currently completing the Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) at Cardiff University. As part of my course, I am carrying out research for my thesis aimed at exploring school staff experiences and views of the Educational Psychology Service response following a critical incident.

Title of Research Project: Exploring the perceptions of school staff in relation to the Educational Psychology Service response they received following a critical incident.

I am writing to enquire if you would be willing to support with participant recruitment in this research. The research seeks to interview senior leaders, teachers, or pastoral leads in primary and secondary schools who have had previous involvement in supporting a critical incident in school within the past three years. The school will also have received support from the Educational Psychologist Service prior to or following the critical incident. The research will involve taking part in a semi-structured interview via Microsoft Teams, this will take between 45-60 minutes where their experiences and views will be explored. One school participant will be interviewed from each local authority area where a response has been received to provide a breadth of views.

I would be grateful if you could share the letter and attachments outlining the purpose and process of the study with the EP who coordinates the critical incident team within the EPS, for them to distribute to senior leaders in relevant schools.

The research aims to develop an understanding of the current practices of support for school staff and future implications for practice. Ongoing supervision and support will be provided by Dr Rosanna Stenner who is a professional tutor at Cardiff University.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this research. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like any further information.

Laura Shaw
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 8: Letter to Senior School staff



Dear Senior Leader,

My name is Laura Shaw and I am a third-year Trainee Educational Psychologist, currently completing the Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) at Cardiff University. As part of my course, I am carrying out research for my thesis aimed at exploring school staff experiences and views of the Educational Psychology Service response following a critical incident.

Title of Research Project: Exploring the perceptions of school staff in relation to the Educational Psychology Service response they received following a critical incident.

The research seeks to interview senior leaders, teachers or pastoral leads in primary and secondary school who have had previous involvement supporting a critical incident in school within the past three years. The school will also have received support from the Educational Psychologist Service prior to or following the critical incident. The research will involve taking part in a semi-structured interview via Microsoft Teams, this will take between 45-60 minutes where your experiences and views will be explored. One school participant will be interviewed from each local authority area where a response has been received to provide a breadth of views.

The research aims to develop an understanding of the current practices of support for school staff and future implications for practice. Ongoing supervision and support will be provided by Dr Rosanna Stenner who is a professional tutor at Cardiff University.

If you would be kind enough to participate, please read the participant information sheet and consent form and share a completed consent form with me at the email address below by 13th December 2024. I will then contact you to arrange a suitable time to meet to conduct the semi-structured interview.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this research. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like any further information.

Laura Shaw
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 9: Social Media Post

Calling all Educational Psychologists involved in supporting schools with critical incidents. Please get in touch if one of your schools would like to share their experience and views of the support they received prior to or following a critical incident.

Appendix 10: Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

1. What is the purpose of this research project?

The purpose of the research project is to explore school staff experiences and views of the Educational Psychology Service response following a Critical Incident. The researcher is interested to hear your experience and views in relation to the support provided and what type of support is considered to be the most valuable following a Critical Incident. The research will also look at the perceived role of the EP in relation to Critical Incidents and hopes that this will inform future practice of Critical Incidents in schools.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study as you have a pastoral, teaching, or senior leadership role in a primary or secondary school, and you have had experience of being involved in a CI and being supported by an Educational Psychologist in the past two years.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you would like to take part in the research, I will discuss the research project with you, and you will be invited to read and accept statements of consent. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in the research project up to two weeks after the interview has taken place, without giving a reason, even after signing the consent form. After a two-week period, the interview will be transcribed and anonymised and you will no longer be able to withdraw from the research project. The research findings will then be shared in a research report outlining key themes and findings. Participants will not be identified in the report.

4. What will taking part involve?

If you choose to take part, you will be expected to participate in a short interview. This will take between 45-60 minutes with a researcher who is a second-year student researcher on the Doctor of Educational Psychology programme at Cardiff University. The interview will be via Microsoft Teams and this will be recorded for data analysis purposes.

5. Will my taking part in this research project be kept confidential?

All data will be anonymised, confidential and identified by a pseudonym (and not by original name). Data will be stored securely in the researcher's password protected electronic files on a password protected computer and will only be accessed by the researcher and research supervisor. Once the audio recordings of the interviews have been analysed, the audio recording will be destroyed, this will be within two weeks of the interviews. The only reason the information you provide will not remain

confidential is in the exceptional case where the welfare of a child is identified as at risk. The researcher will work closely with her supervisor (Dr Rosanna Stenner) to manage the disclosure and all relevant people and agencies will be contacted.

6. What will happen to my Personal Data?

Any personal data such as the consent form and interview transcripts will be stored and processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All data will be retained for a minimum period of five years after the end of the project or after publication of any findings based upon the data (whichever is later) as per the Research records and retention schedule. The audio recording will be stored in the researcher's password protected electronic files on the Universities password protected computer which will only be accessed by the researcher and research supervisor. The audio recording will be transcribed and anonymised after a two-week period and after this time participants will not be able to withdraw from the study. Once the audio recordings of the interviews have been analysed, the audio recording will be destroyed, this will be within two weeks of the interviews.

Cardiff University is the Data Controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data Protection legislation. Further information about Data Protection may be found at

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/data-protection>

7. What happens to the data at the end of the research project?

Following the data collection, the interview will be transcribed by the researcher. The transcript will be anonymised and identified by a pseudonym (and not by original name). Data will be stored securely in the researcher's password protected electronic files on a password protected computer and will only be accessed by the researcher, Laura Shaw and research supervisor, Dr Rosanna Stenner.

8. Who is organising this research project?

The research is organised by Doctorate student and Trainee Educational Psychologist Laura Shaw and academic supervisor Dr Rosanna Stenner, Cardiff University.

9. Who has reviewed this research project?

This research project has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by The School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee (SREC), Cardiff University.

10. Further information and contact details.

Should you have any questions relating to this research project, you may contact me via email.

Laura Shaw
Trainee Educational Psychologist
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Email: Shawlm@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Rosanna Stenner
Research Supervisor
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Email: stennerr@cardiff.ac.uk

Any complaints can be made to:
Secretary of the Ethics Committee
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Tel: 029 2087 0707
Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

If you provide consent to be involved in the research. I would be grateful if you could sign the attached consent form and email it to me.

Thank you for taking the time to consider if you would like to take part in this research project.

Appendix 11: Consent Form

Title of research project: Exploring the perceptions of school staff in relation to the Educational Psychology Service response they received following a Critical Incident.

Name of researcher: Laura Shaw

Please take a moment to read the statements below before you begin and please initial each box to indicate that you have understood and agree to each statement.

**Please
initial box**

I confirm that I have read and understood the 'Information for participants' document for this research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any adverse consequences until the point of data anonymisation (2 weeks post interview). To do this I need to email Laura Shaw within two weeks of the interview taking place.	
I understand that data collected during the research project may be looked at by individuals from Cardiff University, where it is relevant to my taking part in the research project. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.	
I understand who will have access to my personal information, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the research project.	
I provide consent for the interview to be audio recorded for the purpose of the research project. I understand that the audio recording will be transcribed and anonymised quotes from the interview may be used in the report.	
I understand how the findings and results of the research project will be written up and published.	
I agree to take part in this research project.	
I understand that if I disclose any information of concerns regarding the welfare of a child, this information will need to be shared. The researcher will work closely with her supervisor (Dr Rosanna Stenner) to manage the disclosure and all relevant people and agencies will be contacted.	

By signing the consent form, you are providing informed consent to take part in the research project.

Name of participant (print)

Date

Signature

Thank you again for participating in this research.

Appendix 12: Debrief

Many thanks for taking part in the study, I was interested to hear your experiences and views of factors that facilitate staff to feel supported following a critical incident. I hope this will inform future practice of support for school staff in critical incidents.

What was the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of school staff in relation to the Educational Psychology Service response they received following a Critical Incident.

What support can I receive following the interview?

If your participation in the study has caused any feelings of distress or anxiety, receiving support may help.

You may wish to speak to your line manager or supervisor to discuss your feelings. If you feel you would benefit from more targeted support, refer to your local authority website to access the specific advice and guidance on employee counselling and mental health. For example the Employer Assistance Programme.

The Staff Wellbeing Service is a free 24/7 helpline to provide emotional support to teachers and education staff who have experienced difficult feelings or situations. Immediate, confidential and emotional support is provided by a qualified counsellor. Contact details are provided below.

Staff Wellbeing Service (UK wide):

Telephone: 08000 562 561

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/get-help/help-for-you/helpline/>

What will happen to my information?

All data will be anonymised, confidential and identified by a pseudonym (and not by original name). Data will be stored securely in the researcher's password protected electronic files on a password protected computer and will only be accessed by the researcher and research supervisor. Once the audio recordings of the interviews have been analysed, the audio recording will be destroyed, this will be within two weeks of the interviews. The only reason the information you provide will not remain confidential is in the exceptional case where the welfare of a child is identified as at risk. The researcher will work closely with her supervisor (Dr Rosanna Stenner) to manage the disclosure and all relevant people and agencies will be contacted.

Any personal data such as the consent form and interview transcripts will stored and processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All data will be retained for a minimum period of five years after the end of the project or after publication of any findings based upon the data (whichever is later) as per the Research records and retention schedule. The audio recording will be stored in the researcher's password protected electronic files on the Universities password protected computer which only be accessed by the researcher and research supervisor. The audio recording will be transcribed and anonymised after a two-week period and after this time

participants will not be able to withdraw from the study. Once the audio recordings of the interviews have been analysed, the audio recording will be destroyed, this will be within two weeks of the interviews.

Cardiff University is the Data Controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data Protection legislation. Further information about Data Protection may be found at

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/data-protection>

Should you have any questions relating to this research project or feel you no longer wish for your interview to be part of the research, please contact Laura Shaw via email within two weeks of the date of your interview.

Laura Shaw
Trainee Educational Psychologist
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Email: Shawlm@cardiff.ac.uk

Any complaints can be made to:
Secretary of the Ethics Committee
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Tel: 029 2087 0707
Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix 13: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Beginning of the interview

- Introduction and explanation of why I am carrying out the research and my interest in this area.
- Recap over the consent form and participant information sheet, explaining how confidentiality will be maintained. Inform participants they can withdraw their consent to participate in the research project up to two weeks after the interview has taken place. After two weeks, the recording will be transcribed and anonymised.
- Explanation of the format of the interview, which will follow an informal discussion around the participants experiences and perceptions of the support provided by the Educational Psychology Service prior to or following a critical incident. Interview questions may be asked as prompts if they have not already been covered in the discussion.
- Inform participants that due to the sensitive nature of discussing a critical incident, it may trigger emotions and I will respond sensitively to their needs. Explain to participants the interview is voluntary, they can avoid answering any questions they would prefer not to answer. Participants can take a break at any point or turn their cameras off if they would prefer to. They also have the option to discontinue the interview at any point without providing a reason.
- Provide the opportunity to ask any questions

Interview Questions

- Briefly describe a critical incident you have experienced.
- What did you find the most difficult to deal with following the CI?
- What do you consider to be the role of the EP in CI?
- What support was provided by the EPS prior to and following the CI?
- What support did you find most helpful?
- What factors made you feel supported?
- What factors did not make you feel supported?
- If a future CI occurred, is there any other support that you would also find helpful either prior to or following a CI?

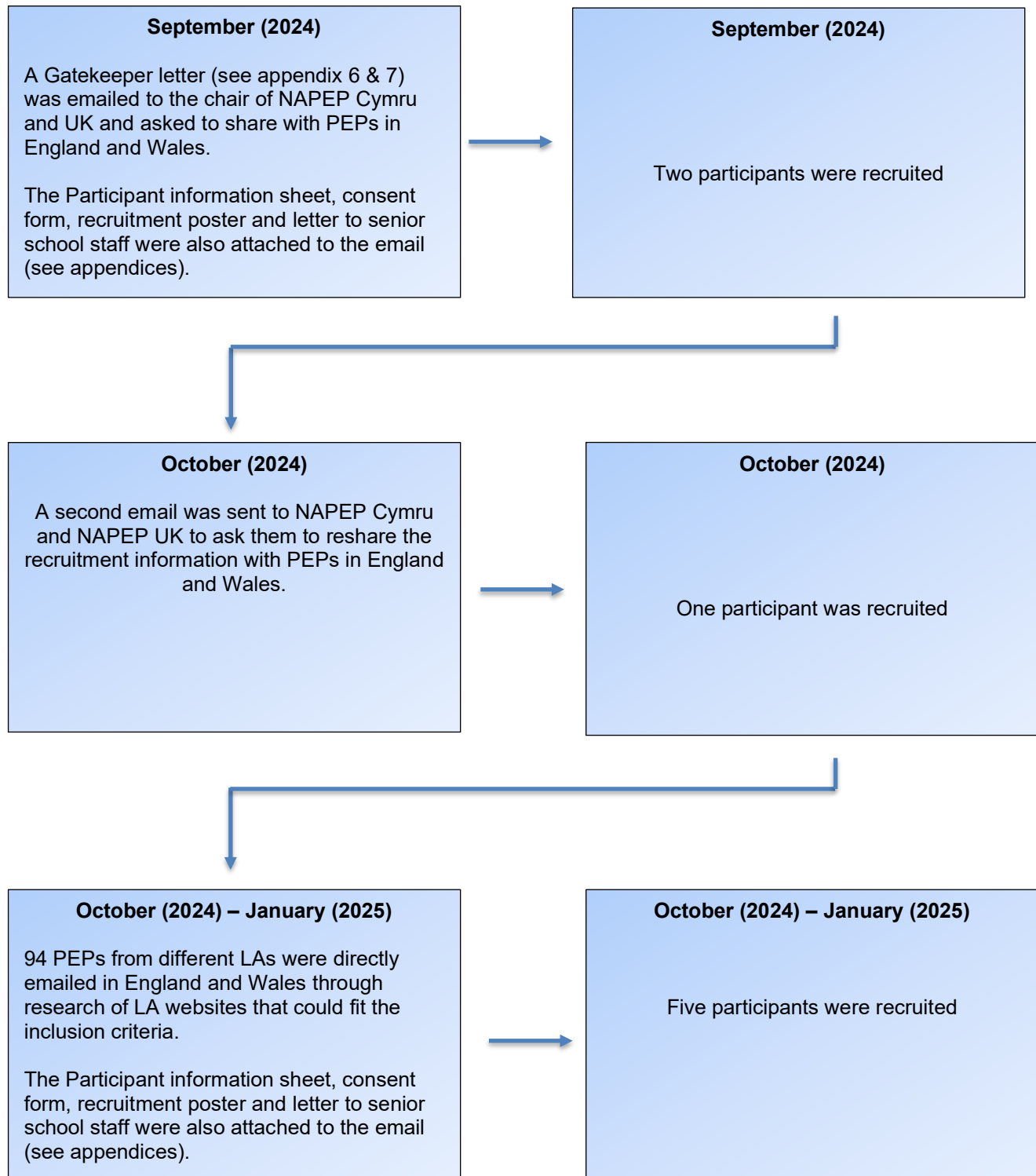
Prompts and Probes

- What can you remember about that situation?
- It sounds like you are saying?
- What do you mean by.....
- Could you tell me more about?
- What did that feel like?
- Does that impact on how you think/ feel?

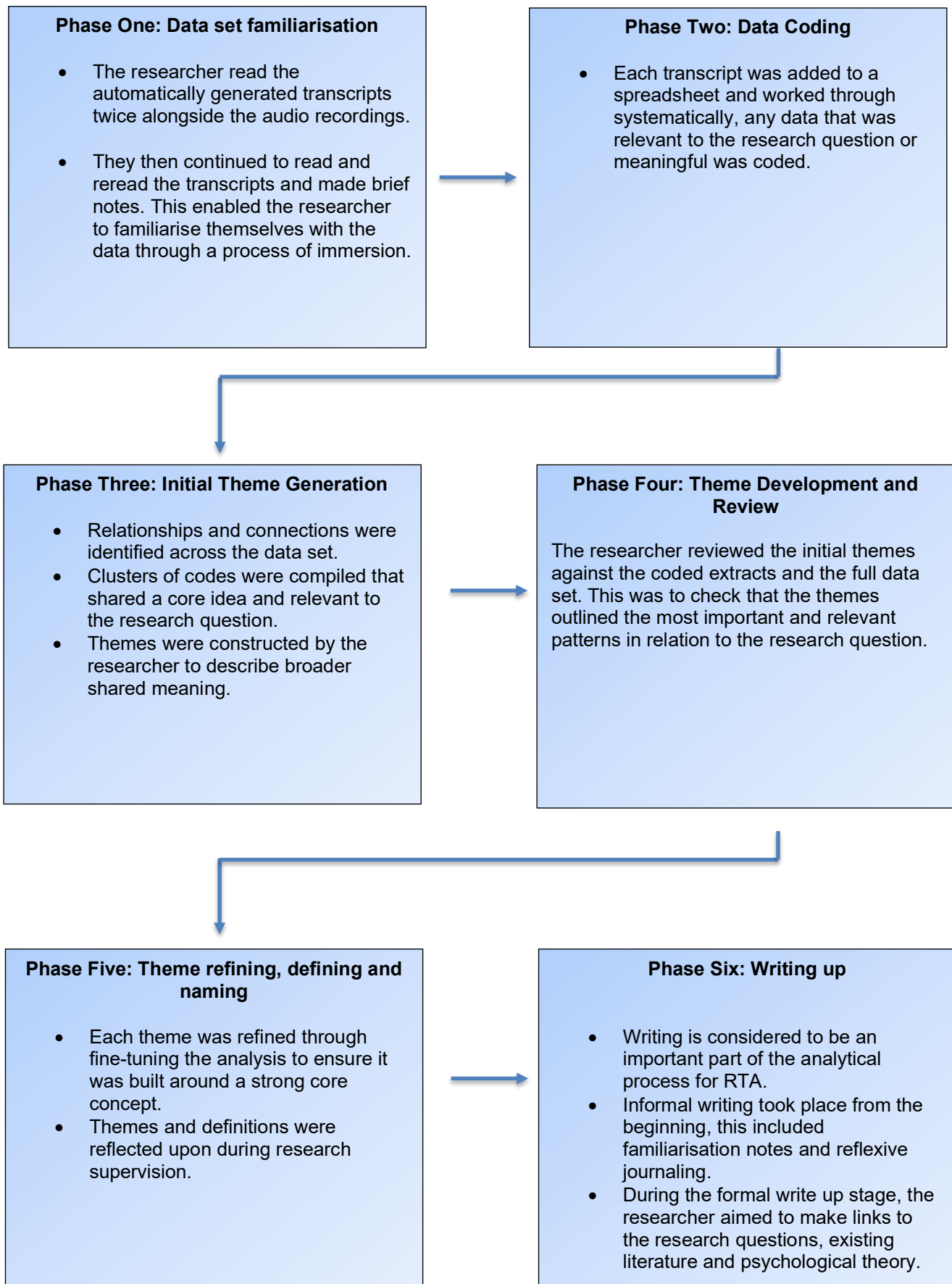
End of the interview

- Ask the participant if there is any other information they would like to share
- Talk through the debrief information and discuss the support available to the participant.
- Ask the participant if they have any questions
- Thank the participant for participating in the research

Appendix 14: Recruitment Process



Appendix 15: Process of RTA informed by Braun and Clarke (2022)



Appendix 16: Ethical Considerations

Ethical Consideration	How was this addressed
Signed informed consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent was gained via the following Gatekeepers, the Chair of the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists UK (NAPEP) (Appendix 6) and the Principal Educational Psychologists (PEP) (Appendix 7). The Gatekeepers confirmed via email. • Participants were provided with participant information sheets (Appendix 10) and consent forms (Appendix 11) which outlined the purpose of the study and how their data would be stored. They were asked to read through both documents before ticking and signing the consent form and return the document prior to being interviewed. • Participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and how their data would be stored before the interview started.
Right to withdraw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants were reminded that participation is voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any point up to two weeks after the interviews, prior to the research being anonymised and the audio recordings being deleted.
Confidentiality and anonymity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants were informed that the interview would be recorded and stored in the researcher's password protected electronic files on the university's password protected computer. They were also informed that the audio recording would be transcribed and anonymised after a two-week period and after this time, the audio recording would be destroyed, and participants would be unable to withdraw from the study. Any quotations were anonymised and the researcher ensure that the participant or school could not be identified (BPS, 2021). • All data would be held in accordance with GDPR, and all data would be anonymised.
Online Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The transcript function was used on the Microsoft Teams, this was outlined at the beginning of the interview and anonymised after a two-week period.
Participant welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants were provided with a debrief sheet following the interview which provided recommendations for support they could access following the interview and further information to support their wellbeing. • Participants were also provided with the opportunity to ask any questions.
Maintaining integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was important that the researcher remained reflexive and engaged in regular supervision to reflect upon the research process. • The researcher followed the six steps of reflexive thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022).

Appendix 17: Trustworthiness of qualitative research using Yardley's (2017; 2024) framework

Core Principle	Evidence of consideration
Sensitivity to Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A research proposal and ethics form were submitted and gained ethical approval from Cardiff University ethics committee. • A literature review was carried out to explore the existing literature relating to the topic. • Open questions were used in the interview to gather a detailed account of the participants views and experiences.
Commitment and Rigour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher engaged in regular supervision and reflection throughout the research. • The methods for data collection and data analysis were explored and discussed thoroughly through supervision. • A reflexive thematic analysis was carried out, following all six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2022). • The researcher spent a substantial amount of time immersed in coding and analysing the data.
Coherence and Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The methodology provides a detailed overview of the process and evidence of the data analysis process and theme development can be viewed in the appendix. • The researcher has reflected on reflexivity and the research process throughout the reflective summary.
Impact and Importance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relevance of the research to the EP role and practice is discussed. • Limitations of the current literature is outlined in the report.

Appendix 18: Familiarisation of the Dataset (Phase 1 of RTA)

1	Valued the immediate support	As our EPS and so at the time it was xxx and they were very supportive and actually very quick to articulate.	SE2
2	Supportive and providing autonomy to the school	They were really personable about it and they were really kind of sincere in wanting to help us. There was no kind of like we are EPS and this is what we're here to do. They were kind of like what can we do? What do you need from us? We are here. And actually it was only because they were kind of, you know, we know you've been in that role for quite some time. And actually, I'm quite proactive. So therefore I had already gone into right this is what we need, this is where we're at and this is how we proceed.	SE2
3	Supportive approach of the EPS. Focus placed on wellbeing	As soon as we jumped on to the meeting, I was very kind of like, right, OK. And he was like, how are you? And I'm like, yeah, I'm good, thanks. How are you? And he was like, yeah, but how how is it going with you then? How are you managing with all of this? And I was like, oh yeah, I'm fine. Let's carry on. And so it's sort of like, you know, you could quite clearly see that there was that commitment to kind of knowing that there is a responsibility for somebody in my role to carry and therefore, they were both really very genuine and very caring.	SE2
4	Offer of support	They were very clear in saying, look, you know whatever you need. us like if there is something we're at the end of the phone.	SE2
5	Reassurance that advice was the same of support being provided by the school	If we can offer anything here you go and a lot of what they were advising was actually what we were doing anyway. It was really important that we made contact with mum so that we could kind of go. Right, we're here, what do you need from us.	SE2
6	Importance of providing support that is very specific to CI and needs of the school.	Really the advice was about kind of managing the way in which that's explained to staff. If I'm being honest, we didn't go with their explanation. They sent out a link to a document and it was all about kind of post suicide responses, they did offer that and it was us that went against it to an extent in the sense of that would not have been appropriate for all of these different contextual reasons. So we'd already, you know planned out that we were going to have a particular message for all staff.	SE2
7	Importance of meeting individual needs	Them again being able to have that capacity to maybe. specifically, meet the needs of the context of a child rather than the generic sort of protocol or advice that post suicide attempt or post critical incident or post death may necessitate.	SE2
8	Importance of personalising the support	But unfortunately for me there is at this point in time not that necessarily that flexibility for EPS to be able to do that because their educational psychology service and seem to be more closely linked to those children where there is an additional need. So it's sort of, you know, I guess a perception within education is that that keeps it too closely aligned, whereas with the Bereavement counselling and support service you have the ability to then be able to say this is just something related to grief, it's related to bereavement.	SE2
9		"They were an agency that will specialise in grief counselling so that can be bereavement, but it can be bereavement around the loss of any relationship. So in other words, it doesn't have to be as a result of death. It can be all sorts of different things and it can be one to one counselling, but it can also be kind of like group work and so therefore it can be more educational rather than therapeutic practice. So, so they	---

+ ≡ P1 ▾ SP1 ▾ P2 ▾ SP2 ▾ SE1:M ▾ **SE2 ▾** P3 ▾ P4:M ▾

Appendix 19: Generation of Initial Codes (Phase 2 of RTA) and Categorisation of codes into initial themes (Phase 3 of RTA)

Theme One: Emotional Support:

Code	Quote	Participant
Immediate support provided containment and reassurance	The fact that I was able to on the day that she died have a team to call at like 3:30 in the afternoon during Easter holidays with two people, one who's trained in this was great because I had lots of questions around OK, so communication with parents, communication with children's assemblies, you know, tomorrow we've got the 124 children coming to the rehearsal. What do I do?	P1
Containment and supervision for staff and SLT	Both EPs set up in my office for the whole day and were just there for any for any adults who needed them. What was great was because I kept coming back to my office, they were there for me as well, so I could just like ask any question, I was able to talk to the EPS about how we talked to parents, how we talked to children about that as well.	P1
Follow up support	Yeah, so the EP checked in towards the end of the week and asked if anybody needed any more support or kind of plans going forward, we didn't need any more support at that time but it was just reassurance to know that you can go back to her.	P1
Reassurance	I guess like one of the most important messages they gave me was to tell staff that, like you can't do anything wrong. Like everybody's scared to have to say the wrong thing or to or to do the wrong thing. But actually, as long as you'd be an empathetic, as long as you're to children and as long as you're not one of the things that I find quite tricky was that.	P1
Containment	Because it just like from like that Thursday until the Monday. It just consumes everything you do and you're very aware that you don't want to like there's lots of questions that you might like ask the Mum or Dad, but you don't want to ask because they are grieving and you don't want to keep bothering them, so to be able to speak to the EPS about. Like ways that this has been done before and they've been in that situation before was really good.	P1
Focus on supporting the staff	They kind of then meet in the two people who are going to be there supporting everybody on a Monday. The night before was really important because I was able to, like, reassure staff in that meeting on the Monday morning that, well, we got xxx and we've got xxx. They're in my office, they are there for adults. That was one of the things that staff find difficult was, yeah, but aren't they going to be in, like, with us? It's like, no, they like research shows that it should be trusted adults that are doing that work with the children.	P1

Containment	I think from a personal point of view, having them both in a space where I kept coming back to forced me to interact with them. because each time I came back they asked me, OK, so how are you doing, you know? Tell me. Tell me what? Like, tell me how that went. You know, are you going to change anything when you do it for the next group of children? Have you, have you eaten? Have you had something to drink?	P1
Check in	Was like the EPS would be asking me. So what are you doing later? You know who's at, who's at home for you. What you get. You know what's going to? Who's been for who's been for you? Like, who's been with you so far?	P1
Supervision	You're constantly dealing with families who are who are fine, having really difficult situations. So we've given all senco supervision. That's worked really well. And then within, we've got, like, an alliance of, like, 50 schools in aren't in maths. And we've now started to head teacher supervision as well.	P1
Immediate response	Children and young people who are in similar positions, and I think that's where xxx help, has been invaluable for us because his support has been there. He drops everything for the last bereavement that we had. That was only a few weeks ago, just before the start of term and xxx was in right at the beginning of term.	SP1
Containment for staff	Having, which was all incredibly difficult for staff because they're having to manage their own emotions and keep those in check to manage the needs of the students. So to have the EP be on site. Just for people to drop in and out and I think whole team went at one point just to talk so they could talk together, gave them a bit more strength to go back and deal with the needs of the other children while still being able to grieve the loss of our students..... Just to be able to have the space to talk to him about how to manage her team. You know, your own feelings and then manage them.	SP1
Existing EP Relationship	I think that one advantage of it being xxx is that he's been with us for so long, so he knows all our students really, really well and he knows families. And I think from my point of view, being able to talk to somebody about how you're feeling, it's helpful to talk to somebody that knows the background, knows the story, knows the student.	SP1
EP knows CYP needs	And knows our kids well enough to know what might work when we're trying to support them.	SP1
Containment	So I think having him as a sounding board. As well as his, I mean, he's incredibly empathic person. So having him to just to be able to. Talk to not like a counsellor. You know, just to be able to sit there and kind of what he did, I suppose, was to hold our feelings It was a safe space.	SP1
Relationship with school community	I think the relationship with the school is key. From our point of view, I mean it's a very specialist setting. I think having somebody that knows the students and the families and the staff has made a massive difference because people feel safe talking to him. I don't feel he's going to judge them and they can just go and say what they need. They've kind of got it out in that safe space and then they pick themselves up, put the team back together and went and got on with it, you know, the day-to-day bit of managing the students.	SP1

Immediate response	I mean he's incredibly responsive and he did just rearrange. He's done it every time. He's just rearranged his appointments and just come and being available. It kind of varies. It's he's somebody that we can go back to.	SP1
Containment	To kind of say right, I've got this situation and I kind of just need a bit of advice. I know this is not about the kids, but if we don't get it right with the team, it's not going to be right for the kids. So he's again that knowledge that he has of the staff in the school and the children and families has just paid off wholesale.	SP1
Informal catch up	Yeah. And he's in for annual reviews regularly. So he's amazing and it is that 5 minutes that makes such a difference.	SP1
Emotional impact	Yeah, we do. We carry alot and I think in terms of leadership when you're. You have to keep your own grief to the back. And because you're managing everybody else to try and make it an easier pathway for them. So you know, yeah, we have no sufficient, but we do have xxx who is always ready to just listen or I can just fire off an e-mail and say help.	SP1
Immediate response	And we kind of needed it was not a situation that any of us in the senior leadership team had experienced as practitioners. So they responded quite quickly, which was brilliant because that's what you're looking for when you're feeling like you're dealing with the unknown. And physically come into schools. So we're not doing it virtually, not just doing it on the phone, that physical presence has really helped, I think.	P2
Support for school staff	I think they're quite flexible in what they can provide, what they offered us was for one of their senior EPS to come in with less experienced junior and they talked through what had happened with the staff that were directly involved. And whoever felt that they wanted, they offered it to everybody. So who's ever felt that they wanted that? So they did spend quite a good few hours actually with them, talking through what happened, talking through. both support for the teachers on a professional level and on a per on a on a personal level.	P2
Balance of practical strategies` and reassurance	And so that initial support for EPS to come in and to be able to talk through kind of the incident and give them some practical things they can do, but also to say there is no one solution to reassure really was really helpful and it takes away that personal element of it, it's someone that's really worked very well trained, that can come in and offer that guidance that we wouldn't be able that soon, you know and to an extent, some supervision. But they've since they've since signposted one of our teachers to save spaces.	P2
Initial phone and then prioritising support for staff	So we had initial chat on the phone to them. I guess our priority as senior leaders is the family, the peoples, the families, the staff and then ourselves.	P2
Reassurance	I think the reassurance for staff definitely, subsequently I had another visit from one of their senior EPS because the child transitioned into a different class and then the new teacher was left dealing with all of this and finding it really hard. So the EP came in and again did some work with her and the teaching assistant about how, you know, how to support. So it's kind of that talking it through what are the right things to say, what you know, what	P2

	can we should you steer away from that kind of thing then knowing that they're doing all the right things. That reassurance was really helpful.	
Felt having first line of response helpful	I think that that first line of response is really helpful for a school because often we're left alone dealing with these things. So you know my experience with them has been really good in the we can just contact them and they're quite familiar to us.	P2
Supportive relationships	But we're lucky enough to have that. You know, I know two people fairly well, so being able just to kind of know who I'm speaking to be able to get that help quickly. That's really key in those instances because a lot of the time, schools just feel like what they've dealt with anything like this before. It's, you know, can be really shocking. So for me, knowing them and because, you know that inevitably there's a little bit of a trust element, isn't there and someone rocks up that maybe isn't as experienced or isn't you know that in that kind of instance it's pretty bad. It's already feeling like you're lost at sea.	P2
Quick response	I don't know whether it's the same for all schools, but they're easily accessible. So if I sent an e-mail today, I know I pretty much get a response within 24 hours. That's brilliant for us.	P2
supervision for staff	The actual service they provided is really good, so where they've come in, but also where they've signposted so that I didn't know that they could offer supervision for our staff, so that's been brilliant. I wouldn't have known about that.	P2
Reassurance	Yeah, I think it's probably that it what they've said makes me feel like, OK, my thought process is right. You know, you don't have to rush through counselling for a child. We don't, you know, we can feel our way around this. There is no right and wrong kind of response. So all those things that you think, OK, I think that's it. They reassure you that yeah, you're, you know, that is fine what you're doing is fine.	P2
Check in	Well, I think that's it. And I think, you know, check ins and things like that have been good.	P2
Reassurance	They kind of reinforced the stuff that I was applying because a lot of my stuff is around the mental health and the staff and the students and trauma etcetera so it kind of reinforced that we're on the right path.	SP2
Supervision for staff	We sat there with the students ourselves and we took advice from external services and we kind of made sure that we support them and we've got the support from the external services. The supervision of the education Psychology service was great. It was really, you know, very impactful staff accessing this again was not difficult, but staff were quite reserved in doing that.	SP2
Mutual respect	So I think that mutual respect and understanding professionally kind of helps in the situation. You know, knowing that we are SEMH knowing that we actually focus a lot on development lands kind of real life like complex trauma. I think because of the relationship that we have, that's what made it work. If the educational psychology service was coming into schools and had a different kind of thing where they were more, you need to have this in	SP2

	place, you need to have this in place that would change the whole dynamic of the support that we would have asked for. Because again, you have that blocked trust kind of shield up, but we don't have that with them.	
Relationship with EP	And we haven't received any training from that, but we didn't need any because I think it's a very kind of close relationship with the educator. So I talked to them each week anyway. So actually them coming in, it wasn't invasive, it was just people who I knew who you know what often compassion and some kind of support that way.	SP2
Impact on SLT	The support for SLT is key because I think it's quite apparent the impact on the ground floor, it's impact that you know staff are going to be struggling to deal with their own emotions while it's also trying to support a young person, especially with complex needs as well which kind of adds to that. This time we asked for supervision on the second one to have ground floor staff and SLT separately. So could you pop in and see the SLT just how you do and have a cup of coffee with them? I mean, bless them, 15 cups of coffee that day because they were having coffee with everyone. But that was really and actually the head of school opened up. And kind of said I'm really struggling with this one and he opened up, but even though I do supervision for staff the head of school won't come to me and say I'm really struggling but also just having someone from outside was really key for SLT.	SP2
Dual approach of supervision and also psychological knowledge of CI/	Having the two sides of it, so I mean the ones who provided me with supervision, just basically just had like the same tracks we have most weeks about things and you know, but it was more on my side rather than me chatting them, what they're going through. But having the advice and guidance from someone who was a specialist in that area, it may be it's. I think it's my mindset. I find that whenever I'm stuck with the challenge, I'll go out of my community of practise and find out what's out there and having someone who's been trained in that really give me a lot of kind of. I've heard of it's safe by just by having someone like that to be able to say. Yeah, this is what you would normally do when having that conversation.	SP2
Coaching to support	And I think it was the fact I think it was there nothing forced. It was all just coaching. It was all just advice and guidance. And rather than having someone come in and say this is what you need to do, that's all.	SP2
Reassurance	It was. It was strange. So the first meeting that the educational psychologists, the one who I'm very close with kind of came in and I had my partner. I said OK, this is what we're going to do for this. This is what we're going to do for that. And then she was like, yeah, you've actually covered this all right.	SP2
Follow up support	We've also the team have come in, the Ed Psychs came in or supported in the run up to the trial as well. So whilst it is the same critical incident, it's sort of slightly different in terms of the response and how we dealt with it, sort of following the initial the initial sort of immediate trauma you know the sort of acute trauma of that moment and the following week when pupils.	SE1: M

Follow up check ins	And the EP, I think touches base with xxx quite regularly. Anyway. Now just to see how things are so that ongoing support as well has been wonderful for us.	SE1: M
EP support for staff	What we found was there was really excellent support for our pupils being provided, but we struggled with providing it for the staff sort of as much. So the Ed Psych team were absolutely instrumental in that and they were fantastic in balancing the response to pupils and also staff and and I had to coordinate staff and try and almost triage. So I was sort of in that responsibility of who did I think needed access.	SE1: M
Capacity	I was obviously trying to run the school. So xxx had like the higher level of dealing with the bigger authorities. You know, the police and everything that was happening in and then it was sort of mine and xxx jobs to keep the school running in some way and also ensure that people are having support. I was not deputy head of a school in terms of my job is normally like standards timetabling, you know that sort of. And it just didn't it became managing emotions and well-being. And I said to the EP, we could not have functioned as I don't know how we would have functioned for a school.	SE1: M
Not ready for supervision	And the EP would just be on a personal level, checking in with me and so would like just say how are you and say look, we have to and they were almost saying we have to speak to you. You know that you and the people who are immediately involved not only in the actual incident and I was perhaps not receptive to that initially. Then I just said look can I just have a really quick moment because, I just wasn't sleeping and just I found the conversation with her was just really helpful	SE1: M
SLT accessing supervision	Everyone was saying, oh, no, I don't want to occupy a slot because I know so and so saw something and they were much worse off than me or I don't think I need it because I didn't see anything. I don't want to occupy a spot. So it was hard to persuade staff in I think pupils were more ready to access it.	SE1: M
Reassurance for community from EPS involvement	Our children are really resilient, but the community and the family said that because of the educational support that we had that they just felt really reassured that the children looked after, so they've been reassured by how well the lockdown had been handled. And then they felt that that they could send their children in which really helped us because the educational support was so amazing. It allowed us to stay open and it reassured parents that there was something in place for the children.	SE1: M
Wrap around care for children following mass CI.	Yeah. So we did whilst we were here for the two weeks, I think there was, they did see some pupils to set them on a steady course really. So they perhaps spoke to them a couple of times. You're just a touch base for their OK. And for some of the children, that was enough. I think, you know, to actually then then for the others it was referral. Yeah. To, to counselling. That happens to us through the Youth service. Wanted to put this huge I think I referred it to the EP said as like AI said, it was like wrap around care was how it felt.	SE1: M

Containment	So you know, it was like 6-7 o'clock sort of evenings and the EP looked exhausted at the end of every day. But we she'd been with xxx or she'd been with me.	SE1: M
Excellent communication Part of community for two weeks	But they were just really excellent in their communication with us, which perhaps other services don't give us that same level of communication. But yeah, we're just having the EP and I think having on site, you know, having the team here amongst us, they felt like they were part of our community for that two weeks. But I guess it was a relationship forged in fire, you know. So I would absolutely trust the EP. I'd have no hesitation now in reaching out if I needed to or maybe another member of the team anyway. Yeah, maybe thrown into it all together like that. Just did feel like one big team. No. So they established trust really quickly just through their professionalism and how slick they were.	SE1: M
Containment	No, it was the emotional support then, because I think we have. Yeah, we had the systems in place. We're quite good at systems and processes and we've got the other supports from county in terms of you know we've got comms there, you know so.	SE1: M
Feeling like had a safety net	It was feeling like we had a safety net, it was having absolute trust in the Ed Psych site team that they could look after our pupils, but that they would communicate with us if we needed to know something and then and then parachuting in, you know when we need it, that we can that xxx can pick up the phone to the EP and say I really need you here for next week. And the EP seems to move heaven and Earth to make sure that that happens.	SE1: M
Containment	Staff said that at no point did sort of me or xxx seem panicked. But I think it's because they didn't see the conversations that we were having with the Ed psych team as well in the background, maybe. So my advice would be to leaders is to lean on the Ed psych team, knowing that the Ed Psych team in their team have their council. What you have your sort of. They provide, but just knowing that they will be there, they will catch you, you know, and support you in your role.	SE1: M
Supervision	But then I said to the headteacher before we should have supervision. I said because we you just absorb, you just absorb and it's got nowhere to go other than xxx. And I like ping pong it back up all between us, you know. So, but that very much depends on the relationship between the head and the deputy head, doesn't it? It's not always going necessarily be there. It's just that xxx and I sort of started that. So we've sort of, again, just formed a relationship based on trust because we're both learning as we go. So that allows us to confide in each other.	SE1: M
Reassurance	If we can offer anything here you go and a lot of what they were advising was actually what we were doing anyway. It was really important that we made contact with mum so that we could kind of go. Right, we're here, what do you need from us.	SE2
Containment	As soon as we jumped on to the meeting, I was very kind of like, right, OK. And he was like, how are you? And I'm like, yeah, I'm good, thanks. How are you? And he was like, yeah, but how is it going with you then? How are	SE2

	you managing with all of this? And I was like, oh yeah, I'm fine. Let's carry on. And so it's sort of like, you know, you could quite clearly see that there was that commitment to kind of knowing that there is a responsibility for somebody in my role to carry and therefore, they were both really very genuine and very caring.	
Immediate support	As our EPS and so at the time it was xxx and they were very supportive and actually very quick to articulate.	SE2
Relationships	But should there have already been that closer work in relationship within schools, that may have removed that initial anxiety that was felt, and it may have been that we could have that immediately be much more kind of open to right. Okay. Then help us out. Come in. Come and meet with me. Rather than that testing of the water, if that makes sense. For me, therefore, I know if I'm being very, very honest at the first point of meeting with them separately online. As I've said to begin with, I know that there was that just that little thought at the back of my mind of thinking, what are they going to say? What are they going to try and accuse of what is their? What is our suspicion going to be, what's their concern going to be, what is going to happen as a result of that meeting? What action are they going to take?	SE2
Importance of building trust	If there's an authority where, like you say, if they're working on a bigger scale and they've got a critical incident response team and also an EPS team, I would say that there needs to be an air of caution there because for example, you might be working with the greatest team ever. And you and I work together weekly or however often that needs to be in terms of the context of our remits. However, that means nothing, doesn't it if xxx is the person in your critical incident team who then swoops in at the point where critical incident occurs because it's you that I trust, I've built that relationship with you.	SE2
Relationships	It needs to be about making sure we've got the human level and it needs to be about making sure that that preventative work because they're so clearly rooted with an education, can do just that. It can help to prevent because the wider organisations like the Bereavement, counselling and support service and Camhs and stay well and mind can support but the ones who really help us to prevent the critical incidents are EPS because they're the ones that empower and facilitate us.	SE2
Initial phone call	She made an appointment to sort of ring me at 10:30 and then just kind of run through and ask me sort of what had we already done in the meantime. I think the phone call was the first real body of support from the team, it was incredibly sensitively dealt with, but it was very matter of facts so that the EP could get kind of an idea of where we were up to and what really her team needed to kind of focus on next.	P3
Reassurance	A couple of parents wanted to rush into getting memorials started and left by this by that and shall we go to this and shall we do this and actually having that conversation with the EP allowed me to be able to go whilst we really appreciate your thoughts and whilst we want to make sure that your wishes are thought off too, this is the suggestions that have been made to us and this is what his family and us as a school community will decide as	P3

	and when we're ready and at this point, we're not looking to memorialise it because he's still here and this is still how the process we're going through and that and that's really helped.	
Slowing it down	And we weren't overloaded with things. I almost felt at times I was asking for things and thinking ahead, and the EP was going. It's OK to just stop and be here in the minute and let's do the bits we need to do for now. And then if that does occur, then call me and then we'll deal with it sort of thing. I think she was very good at kind of saying let's only think of now and here we can think a little bit ahead, but don't.	P3
Containment	But I didn't feel like I was being left or placated. It was very much a we're here. And here's the support and we don't go away. You know we won't be in your face. We won't be messaging you every week and giving you a phone call and go. How did your day go? And how did your day go? But it's we are on the end of an e-mail.	P3
Help to feel contained	I think that's what's been vital for us, you know, for me. Because the staff are coming to me, I haven't felt. Overwhelmed 'cause I feel I was given a structure, but they're equally I had a structure I could go back to when a person and a network I could go back to for that next kind of level up of support if we needed it.	P3
Continuous check in to provide supportive approach	Thinking of it, the EP would keep coming back to it to check that I had that understanding, I suppose, and that we felt comfortable, but not, you know, overwhelmed. So it did feel like it was our critical incident. It was our way of dealing with it. But in a right way, in a support, in a kind of professional way, as such and on a personal level. So it was right for us, you know.	P3
Be different so training won't prepare	It would be a very different approach so I don't think training effectively would cover enough of how personal it has to become. Nothing will beat that human contact of knowing there is somebody else out there, There is a team of people that can provide that.	P3
Containing the container	You are very much supporting everybody else. You're the person that, you're keeping everyone calm. You're making sure everything happens. You're not thinking about yourself. So it was really useful having them to just sit and listen.	P4: M
Reassurance	What they did was they went through the protocol with me, which was really helpful and what was the most helpful was it made me think I've done all the right things. But it was really useful just to go through that and say right, have you done this? Have you done that? and just sort of talk through that process. And so that was good because I could say yes, I've done that. I've contacted this person, I've done this, contacted the parents, etcetera.	P4: M
Most important face to face meeting where someone listened	For me, one of the key things was that it was a face to face meeting with somebody that could actually have listened to what you had to say. I mean, I was dealing with a lot of letters and so on, and mostly I was getting lots of emails or comments about how everything was, you know, went really well.	P4: M

Information to provide reassurance.	I had to then look up, you know, lots of resources and information. I kind of knew she was also had already started the process. But it's having things ready so that we can easily share them so that I'm the person who's reassuring, but I so that I can feel reassured that I'm giving the right information and that I've, I've, I've got things you know to share.	P4: M
Relationships with the school community	relationships are key, you know and I think for us the relationships that we have with the majority of the parents here, we're really key because that meant that there was a lot of trust.	P4: M
Continuing to work on relationships	Yeah, that's it really. It's just thinking about those things and keeping relationships going. So that I've been out there and I think that helps us because we're outside most of the time. We're always on the gate. I'm always we've got work to go out. Work's going on. So in the morning at the end of the day, I'm usually out on the street greeting the children and so on. So I think those things are really helpful as well the relationship.	P4: M

Theme Two: Practical Support:

Code	Quote	Participant
Practical support	That was really important. Just so I've kind of thought in 5 minutes of blur and just telling them everything that's going on and then very subjectively, they were able to talk me through. OK well actually like actions for you are going to be this, this, this, this.	P1
Support around grief	We talked, I've managed to get some advice from xxx and xxx around like this, the kind of. Like the natural reaction from adults around children's grief and around how we could help the children, some children would know the news some children wouldn't know the news.	P1
Support with written communication	So I'd written a letter to the school community. Both EPS went through the letter and agreed that that was. That was the right thing to be communicating.	P1
Further questions	They allowed me to get back in contact with them for like Funeral arrangements and stuff like that.	P1
Support with appropriate Language	Like the advice they gave us was around like, this is a definite thing. And so you almost have to treat it like you're talking to an autistic child. I know I said the word 'Pass away' about eight times already. But like, on that day, everything was well. xxx died. xxx died on Friday and that was quite tricky in itself. Being a Church of	P1

	England school because there were members of staff who wanted to talk about heaven and actually the EPS advice was spot on. It was like you can't give any children any hope that xxx is coming back, you know. But they need to understand that xxx died.	
Flowchart and process	The start of the critical incident kind of flow chart within the local authority is first of all that you just get to talk to somebody about what's happened and you talk about what's going to happen now.	P1
Memorial	The children were quite surprised when that happened, but also kids are amazing art makers like they remembered what happened with xxx and we're actually we're really lucky. We've like xxxs family came in over the summer holidays with our site manager and there's a corridor outside of the office. That's one point to it. But that's our xxx Wall and xxx got like loads of photographs up there.	P1
Language and scripts	Kind of like the EPS. Like we're pretty much able to give me a script of like, OK, these this like the most important information you give tomorrow is going to be the factual information, because that's what the kids want to know. Even with xxx, the kids want to know things like when is xxx birthday. How old are her children? Because that's what kids do. They're like and then they someone puts their hand up and says, Oh my, my Gran had cancer. And it's like, yeah. And then someone else puts her hand up and ask you what's for dinner and then you're kind of back in with, OK.	P1
Research based protocols	The critical incident kind of framework and the flow chart that goes for xxx is designed by the EP service. It's actually like research driven based on people have who have been in that situation before and arranged like one of one of the things I couldn't keep getting my head around.	P1
Support with communicating	Trying to find the right ways to support our children whose needs are so different. We have a few verbal kids, we have kids who will communicate with photos or with symbols, but we have a very high percentage group, so we're not uniform and it's trying to find ways that are meaningful for them. To explain the loss that you know they notice in their own ways and it's working with xxx to help us work out how we meet those individual needs.	SP1
Support with language and visuals	How we support those very different students, so for a couple of students who are more able, who used to go to the same after school centre, we did a social story. With very clear language, you know she's dead. She's not coming back when you're dead. This means that you don't breathe anymore. And so and so forth. And then for others, it was about leaving things in the room so that, like, her things in the room. So if they needed to, kind of, if we notice them eye pointing at her empty chair, for example.	SP1
Mutual learning	Psychologists who have an understanding of the level of need about kids, and that's rare. So I think the biggest gap is the knowledge of children with profound multiple learning disabilities and their responses. So I think we kind of bounce backwards and forwards, so if there's something that I'm not sure about and I'll get in touch with xxx. And I think that's been kind of quite nice because we've been developing our skill sets together.	SP1

Policy	Yeah, I'm saying we've got a very clear bereavement policy and there's, you know, the strategy system. The head is usually the first to know then I'm the second. Then we kind of cascade to make sure that everybody that needs to know gets to know and then it's, you know, having a key link for the family. And so that we don't overwhelm the family.	SP1
Bounce ideas	Deciding who's going to funeral, who's going to keep in touch afterwards, how we're going to manage in the classroom, and xxx really, really great for being able to kind of bounce ideas off when we're looking at and also for where we've got differences of opinion among staff who some can't cope with having the child's things still around.	SP1
Different support for CI	Yeah, every single one's been different and all the different cultural connotations that go because we have very mixed population here and very high Muslim population.	SP1
Guidance on how to respond to the child and signposted	But also practically in school, because we need to give support to the child and needed to know how to respond to the child, you know, to support the child as well. So that was useful. And then they signposted us to various groups that could support that particular incident.	P2
Psychology of grief	The biggest part on that incident was actually, I'm very theoretical. I'm very much look at the theory, you know what it does and the empirical evidence and stuff and actually sitting with the specialist in the service to go through a critical incident. This is what happens and it helped me process it an awful lot. Which was beneficial. I think the supervision for staff was really educational.	SP2
Specialist knowledge of EPs	Play the first instant we had two of our. Linked with our skill, but we had an additional one and it was brilliant and I keep on emailing chat with him, but he was a specialist in critical incidents. And the advice he gave me was amazing.	SP2
Importance of a process	I think when the specialist was working with us. It's the case that I like to have things sequential and structured, so I know we're doing this and we're doing that and for him there to sit and oversee that and go, yeah, we've got that and then you've got that and that was key. So I had a process. So I can imagine that there might be places where the process they don't have a critical incident plan, which is all developed. We had one already developed.	SP2
Scripts	The Ed Psychs from the critical incident team were fantastic in providing us with a script that we could go through as well with the pupil. So form teachers had something that they could say that they could go through that they could read with the children. So we've just become good at supporting our children when these real moments of crisis sort of happen.	SE1: M
Signposting of support	She'd be saying that the things that she'd be hearing from pupils because obviously helped us on a strategic level. Maybe if there was a common thread of how pupils were struggling. And all staff as well. You know, that	SE1: M

	<p>was really helpful for us.</p> <p>Pointing us as well, not necessarily breaking confidentiality of it of exactly what was said, but just sort of saying in terms of this member of staff will need more support or this has been said.</p>	
Knowledge of SEN/ALN	The children who are seen were children who already on all of our radars, who had needs. The Ed psych team who are so well equipped to deal with children with those needs anyway, that when they were dealing with a critical incident and there's needs, they just knew the best way to support that child.	SE1: M
Importance of providing specific support	Really the advice was about kind of managing the way in which that's explained to staff. If I'm being honest, we didn't go with their explanation. They sent out a link to a document and it was all about kind of post suicide responses, they did offer that and it was us that went against it to an extent in the sense of that would not have been appropriate for all of these different contextual reasons. So we'd already, you know planned out that we were going to have a particular message for all staff.	SE2
Importance of meeting individual needs	<p>Them again being able to have that capacity to maybe. specifically, meet the needs of the context of a child rather than the generic sort of</p> <p>Protocol or advice that post suicide attempt or post critical incident or post death may necessitate.</p>	SE2
Importance of personalising the support	But unfortunately for me there is at this point in time not that necessarily that flexibility for EPS to be able to do that because their educational psychology service and seem to be more closely linked to those children where there is an additional need. So it's sort of, you know, I guess a perception within education is that that keeps it too closely aligned, whereas with the Bereavement counselling and support service you have the ability to then be able to say this is just something related to grief, it's related to bereavement.	SE2
Support with communication - letters and scripts and language	<p>So what we did is the EP gave me two scripts. One that we could put in a letter to parents so that parents could inform their child. And this is the kind of language that educational psychology would suggest. And this is the language that we'll be using tomorrow in school with the children. And then the EP gave us a kind of rough structure of how we could structure the day to allow the children a chance to kind of.</p> <p>Reflect on what had happened for the staff to be able to reflect on it with them.</p>	P3
scripts	The scripts were the bit that the staff. the most useful because at a point where they're struggling for words themselves, it gave them a very well, effectively, an approach that we had already always taken with the children. You know, an honest, open up approach with the children that was matter of fact, without being scary or confusing.	P3
Ep shared resources and documents and links and practical strategies	<p>But in the meantime, she also sent, like, some of the just sort of documents and links to resources and things that we might well want to have.</p> <p>The EP asked if I had any kind of questions. You know, my questions were around, do we need to have any</p>	P3

	books? Resources are the things we need to have prepared. And she said not really, the suggestion is mainly just have that discussion and that chance to talk with the children.	
Support with language	As I say, following that, the EP did say if we wanted to send any of our letters to her to sort of look over, that was absolutely fine. But we were. I read out to her what we'd already kind of pre prepared and prompted, and we've done that. I did talk to her as well about the physical space of using his classroom.	P3
Memorials	Feedback from parents was. They felt staff answered any concerns they had. They felt their children were well supported on the day they felt their children came away. We've had a few children have had like, that different moments, obviously when they want to talk about it because we kept with the use of scripts and language and we kept with the idea as the EP instead of having, like, a condolences book that remained open, a display that is still there and is still open for the children to use and add to.	P3
Protocols and emergency plan	I mean we've got our protocols and we've got our emergency plan. The Issues I had were a lot of the contact details have not been updated by the local authority, so therefore you know I was trying to contact people on numbers that weren't necessarily the right numbers or people who weren't necessarily the right people.....I kind of feel that like one of the things that would be good from this is for them to have a protocol of what we do to support the school. Rather than lots of emails from different people saying you know, is there anything I can do? I think something that's a bit more unified to say right here some contacts for this person to meet and one person to make that contact.	P4: M
Support with letter and conversations	it was useful to then actually have that help to write the letter and I had kind of drafted and written it anyway. Just to sort of go through some of the things that I could say in terms of, you know, re-establishing the rhythms and routines and things like that. But also having resources and somebody who could put that immediate advice in terms of how you handle those conversations, because what I had to do was provide that information to the staff. What to do? What do you do when the child starts now talking to you about what's happened?	P4: M

Theme Three: Internal support:

Code	Quote	Participant
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SLT supporting the school	I went through the Assembly that I planned and it was a celebration of xxx life and so I took that assembly. And then worked with xxx class and when they came in.	P1
Internal mental health support	We're dead lucky that one of our parents works for camhs, so she was able to come in and support. One of my teachers is mental health first aid trained, the kids teachers' from the previous year don't work the first half of the week, but they both came in on that and we kind of just flooded the room with, support for the children and that was really useful..... One of the things that the EP said to me was that, well, you can give that child a gift of normality, which is that like, if mum and dad choose xxx to come to school. Well, they want him to come to school because they're probably want him to be away from everybody being really sad all the time and then you give him trusted adults that you can talk to and speak to.	P1
Learned from experience	Obviously, based on the actions that we've taken, so that when we needed xxx was terminally ill well. Well, fortunately, we didn't need to think about that process because we knew what was going to happen. It served us well the first time and we were able just to. Unfortunately, it felt a bit like deja vu. Yeah, yeah, I knew very much that it was like assembly wise and what I was going to do and it was celebration of xxx life.	P1
Staffs' reliance on headteacher	Like almost a, not a relief, but like it's OK. Well, xxx got it under control, but I'm glad I'm not xxx. I don't want to stand in front of all those kids, I don't want to stand in front of her friends, I don't want to stand out in the playgrounds.	P1
Normality	One of the things that the EP said to me was that, well, you can give that child a gift of normality, which is that like, if mum and dad choose xxx to come to school. Well, they want him to come to school because they're probably want him to be away from everybody being really sad all the time. I and then you give him trusted adults that you can talk to and speak to, but actually that was that was something I was able to all the staff. Is that like we give the kids the gift of normality. They're here today and they're going to have English. They're going to have maths. They're going to go out for lunch.	P1
Developing resilience	I think when you're frontline and you're faced with these things, you know, I've got years of experience of things happening and I'm not saying they're ever easy, but I've kind of got, I've developed my own coping techniques and my own kind of whereas some of our teachers haven't had that, that might be the first time something dreadful that's happening to one of their pupils or the families.	P2
SLT support for each other	You know we do get help where we need it. But we've also seen leadership team and got each other. So we can we you know we relied on each other a lot and we're more concerned with the staff and the family and the child was supported.	P2
EPs being in the background	I think as part of the actual process. having them in the background, knowing that they're there to support was like it seems any grieving process, you're there with people when you need them and it adds to your resilience in that	SP2

	situation. Having them external resources to fall back on. I think the freedom, once the education psychology service kind of give us the freedom to do things in our own, but we're there in the background, that was really key.	
Learning from experience	Yeah, I remember saying to the educational psychologists, I say, well, it's one of my skills now it's in my warehouse now that I can deal with the situation . I think you'd have to go through that experience to understand they this is what needs to be done because you know it's when you get in a situation like that you become automatic pilot..... I think, in hindsight, we did it differently the next time because the students wanted to go to people who they knew had a relationship with and it was a bit difficult having these new people come in also as well.	SP2
Learned from experience of providing space	I think something that we got wrong on the 1st instance, but the second one, but we talked about how staff grieve and I think because we were ourselves and the leadership team were so kind of reactive in that situation that there was one member of Pastoral who took it very, very hard. And I felt I was chasing around the school trying to help him. So the second one rather than me going down the school, I was down there every day in the first one checking on stuff. I popped down, I says. I'm here upstairs if you need us. I'm not gonna get involved. I do care. But I'm not pressuring you. And actually, I had a lot more people come up and do that. Who needed a bit of guidance.	SP2
Autonomy	And I developed something from the first one I'd use the same approach that the education psychology used for us and that worked a lot better, and he advised about like, just, you know, let people do their own thing 'cause they need that autonomy.	SP2
Internal pastoral support	It's looking at what the later impact or something like that was because there was lots of suppressed anger by a lot of the young people.....So the EPs came in, they weren't massively successful because I think the children weren't in a place where they didn't want to. Actually, they were quite closed off to things and it wasn't because it was a new feeling or something like that. I think it was just the case. They weren't really, really wanting to focus on that. So pastoral had a lot of work to do around that and pastoral did a lot of work around aggression in that area.	SP2
Supportive community	we need to have them in the background to kind of do the things that we can't do, but also as a sounding board is this OK, am I doing this right? That was the biggest thing I've said too.	SP2
Knew what to do due to previous experience	This is what we go do on Monday. This what we need to put in place. We need to contact and you get extra. And I said to him do what's really sad is that we are so adept at this now. But because of what's happened, we've become really aware of what has to be done in terms of communication with form teachers.	SE1: M
Empowered	it enabled us to do is perhaps put systems in place here. So that we can almost run our own then. well-being without having to sort of rely on the Ed psych team.	SE1: M
Aspiring for normality	What we actually found was the best thing was trying to get back to normality as quickly as possible.	SE1: M

Can't fully prepare	So certainly I said whilst you can prepare and you'll have a critical incident policy in place and you know what the Ed psych team can provide. The best advice I can provide is you've just got to roll with it, so whilst you can have strategy and processes in place and that does help, but invariably and it's great because obviously you're not all running around like headless chickens. But on that day of even the actual critical incident, you do have to think on your feet. So there was like all our computer switched off, so we had no way of communicating with staff....So we have to think about how we could communicate with staff quickly, even stuff down to children desperately needing the toilet. You know, they're in lockdown, really simple things. And none of this is in the critical incident policy.	SE1: M
Lessons learned	We learned a lot from it. We'll definitely learn. We're learning in the moment. You know, we didn't. We didn't know when the EP and the team came in that first day. It was just like, what does this look like, you know? But you learn so quickly and appointments in place. And when will they see staff and just? Yeah. You know, you and just room as well. Even just basic things like providing with an actual space, you know.	SE1: M
Providing autonomy	They were really personable about it and they were really kind of sincere in wanting to help us. There was no kind of like we are EPS and this is what we're here to do. They were kind of like what can we do? What do you need from us? We are here. And actually it was only because they were kind of, you know, we know you've been in that role for quite some time. And actually, I'm quite proactive. So therefore I had already gone into right this is what we need, this is where we're at and this is how we proceed.	SE2
Provided with the autonomy	Can you check this letter for me? I'm sure there would have been that support, but actually to have the autonomy still in a time where everything else has already been taken away from us and everything's changed, I think. It meant we could personalise our response to our children, to my team, to what they needed without feeling overwhelmed, that I was not doing it right or doing it the right way, yeah.	P3
Best is to experience it.	I do think going through it was the best preparation because going through it now, I feel like if it was to happen, if something similar was to happen. I would know even without going to the EP the kind of things that I could go back on and support other staff and other leaders with.	P3
Thinking positively	My encouragement was go back through your photo role because you won't have taken photos of all the horrible moments that you've gone through. But I bet you in your camera roles you've got some really precious special memories that 2024 have given you that actually we won't have thought of. So I do think it's so. Yeah, like you say.	P3
Internal practices	We do lockdown practise every term, so all the staff and all the children, it's routine, they know exactly what to do. So we've got a learning mentor in school so, you know, obviously we can offer that. We've got the parent support advisor. So there are certain things we could offer as a school and advice that we could offer. You know, and so I think the key things are the, immediate contact from one team rather than lots of different people.	P4: M

Thinking on your feet.	When I went outside the response from the parents could not have been more positive. I got so much back from the parents say thank you so much for keeping our children safe. Can't believe how quickly you lock down the school. Couldn't believe it. We got in the gate by the time we got to the door, the doors were locked, were locked and the blinds were down.	P4: M
Role of SLT	Liaising with you know, the office staff, the, the police, the ambulance and so on. So that was my role and at the end of the day, what I did was I had a brief meeting for any staff that was still here to say, you know, come to the office so we can just have a chat about what's happened because, of course, they wouldn't have a clue what was going on.	P4: M
Support from school and other schools	I find that as a school I can deal with most things because I have routines and I've got procedures in place. And because we are prepared and for me knowing that was a real help and the fact that we could just emulate took two minutes to shut the school down. It took no time at all. It was just all very smooth and for me that so there wasn't that running around like a headless chicken. So that that makes you feel like you've got an element of control.	P4: M

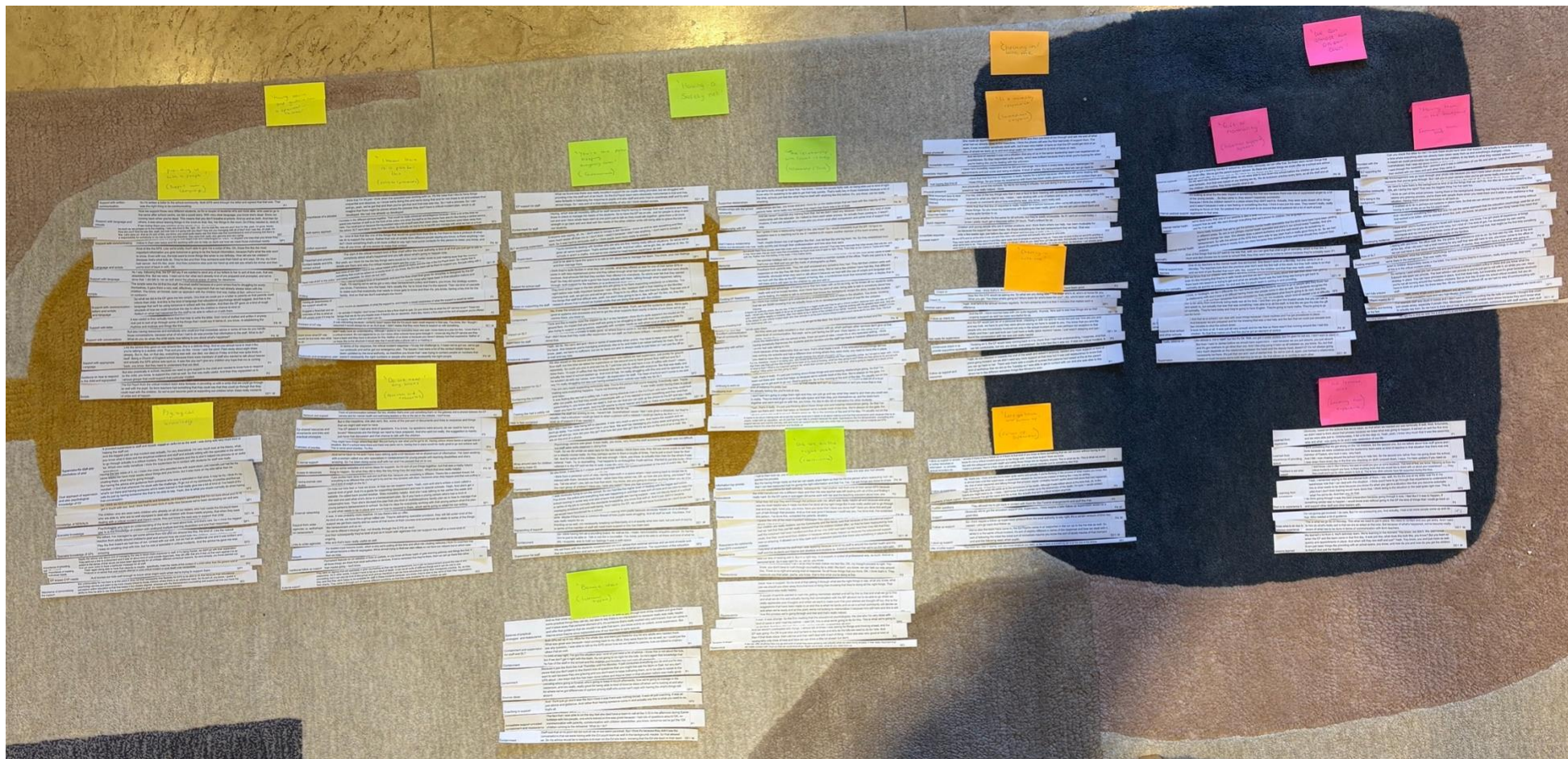
Theme Four: Future Strategies:

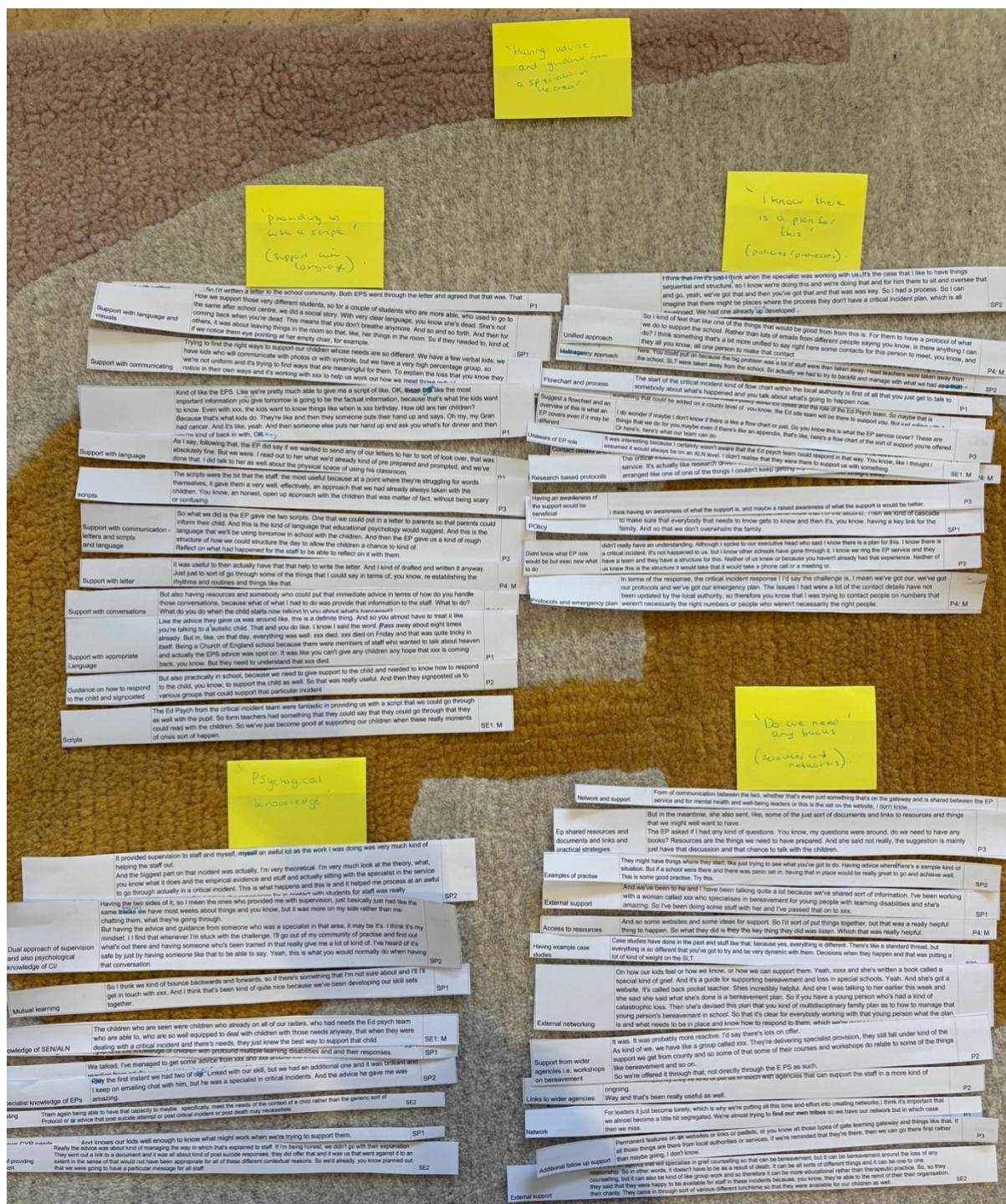
Code	Quote	Participant
External support	We've got the primary mental health specialists that the NHS have been piloting in different areas. She always does a parent workshop and she said would you do something on bereavement.	P1
External support	I've been working with a woman called xxx who specialises in bereavement for young people with learning disabilities and she's amazing. So I've been doing some stuff with her and I've passed that on to xxx on how our kids feel or how we know, or how we can support them. Yeah, xxxx and she's written a book called a special kind of grief. And it's a guide for supporting bereavement and loss in specialist schools. Yeah. And she's got a website. It's called back pocket teacher. Shes incredibly helpful. And I was talking to her earlier this week and she said she said what she's done is a bereavement plan. So if you have a young person who's had a kind of catastrophic loss then she's devised this plan that you kind of multidisciplinary family plan as to how to manage that young person's bereavement in school which we're going to adapt for our setting.	SP1
Links to wider agencies	Subsequently they've kind of put us in touch with agencies that can support the staff in a more kind of ongoing way and that's been really useful as well. It was probably more reactive. I'd say there's lots on offer as kind of we, we have like a group called xxx. They're delivering specialist provision; they still fall under kind of the support we get from county and so some of their courses and workshops do relate to some of the things like bereavement and so on. So we're offered it through that, not directly through the EPS as such.	P2
Multi agency approach	Correlate in the different services together. That would be really advanced advantageous because I think a lot of the time we spend one member of staff is on the front of the police one when the staff is on the phone here and it's like having a central service here. You could pull on because the big problem was a lot of stuff were then taken away. Head teachers were taken away from the school, SLT were taken away from the school. So actually we had to try to backfill and manage with what we had as a trust.	SP2
Examples of practise	Having advice where here's a sample kind of situation. If a school were there and there was panic set in, having that in place would be really great to go and achieve well. This is some good practise, try this like case studies which have been done in the past and stuff like that, because yes, everything is different. There's like a standard thread, but everything is so different that you've got to try and be very dynamic with them.	SP2
Unaware of EP role	It was interesting because I certainly wasn't aware that the Ed psych team could respond in that way. You know, like I thought I assumed it would always be on an additional learning needs level. I didn't realise that they were there to support us with something. And we don't have in the critical incident policy about Ed Psychs and the role of the Ed Psych team. So maybe that is something that could be added on a county level of, you know, the Ed Psych team will be there to support you, but just rolling with it and being adaptable.	SE1: M

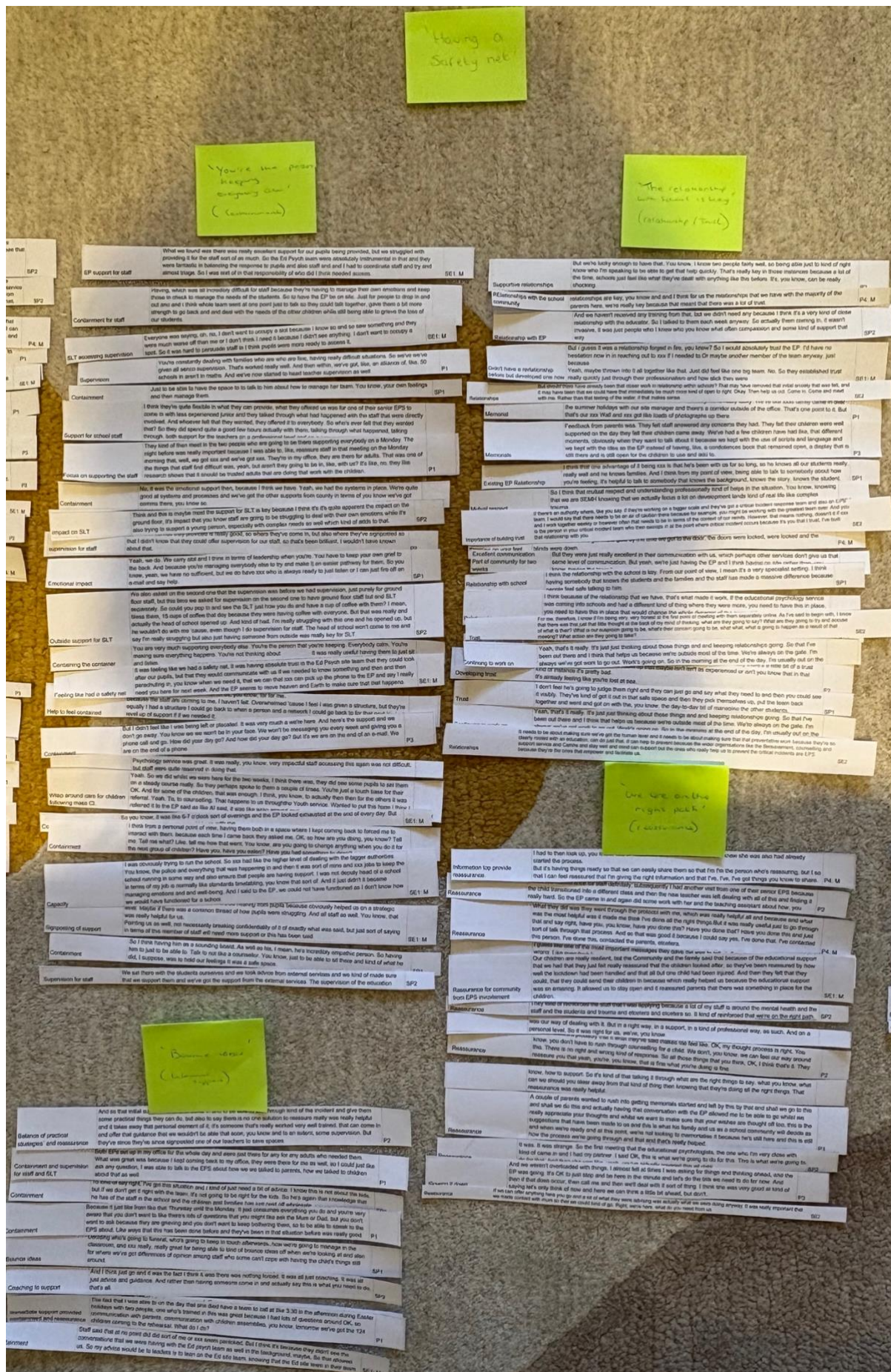
Specialist support in grief and bereavement	They were an agency that will specialise in grief counselling so that can be bereavement, but it can be bereavement around the loss of any relationship. So in other words, it doesn't have to be as a result of death. It can be all sorts of different things and it can be one to one counselling, but it can also be kind of like group work and so therefore it can be more educational rather than therapeutic practice. So, so they said that they were happy to be available for staff in these incidents.	SE2
Offer of further support	They were very clear in saying, look, you know whatever you need. us like if there is something we're at the end of the phone.	SE2
Didn't know what EP role would be but exec new what to do	I didn't really have an understanding. Although I spoke to our executive head who said I know there is a plan for this. I know there is a critical incident. It's not happened to us, but I know other schools have gone through it. I know we ring the EP service and they have a team and they have a structure for this. Neither of us knew or because you haven't already had that experience. Neither of us knew this is the structure it would take that it would take a phone call or a meeting or.	P3
Suggest a flowchart and an overview of this is what an EP covers even if it may be different	I do wonder if maybe if there is like a flow chart or just, do you know this is what the EP service cover? These are things that we do for you. Maybe even if there's like an appendix, that's like, here's a flow chart of the sort of support you're offered. Or here's, what our team can do or permanent features on websites or links or padlets, or you know all those types of learning gateway and things like that. If all those things are there from local authorities or services, if we're reminded that they're there, then we can go there first .	P3
Network and support	Form of communication between the two, whether that's even just something that's on the gateway and is shared between the EP service and for mental health and well-being leaders or this is the set on the website, I don't know.	P3
Uncertainty of future support	Yeah, it's things like when we come up to the anniversary of the death. Although it was talked about at the time that, oh, in the future you might want to do. I mean, I don't know if when it comes up to the anniversary of the death, I'm sure I would contact the EP because I've got her name and her e-mail. But actually that isn't a critical incident anymore. I wonder if there is like a follow up or if there is something that we can access like this is what we do. This is what we cover. Here's a process. Here's a flow chart, just an update, just an annual reminder just to something else This has almost been a bit like supervision, a supervision session for me and talking through that process because I probably haven't spoken about that since that had happened.	P3
Having an awareness of the support would be beneficial	I think having an awareness of what the support is, and maybe a raised awareness of what the support is would be better.	P3
Network	For leaders it just becomes lonely, which is why we're putting all this time and effort into creating networks, I think it's important that we almost become a little bit segregated. We're almost trying to find our own tribes so we have our network I don't know if the EP had said could you give us some feedback. That kind of, you know, following on from the critical incidents support you have. Is there anything more that you would like to share with us about your experience?They then could put it out for other people to look at. This is how other schools have felt supported during this time.	P3
Follow up supervision	This has almost been a bit like supervision, a supervision session for me and talking through that process because I probably haven't spoken about that since that had happened.	P3
Contact details and EPs contact school	But yeah, so I think for me the key things were would be for even better raves is just making sure that the contact details are there and also the critical incident team are the ones that contact straight away.	P4: M

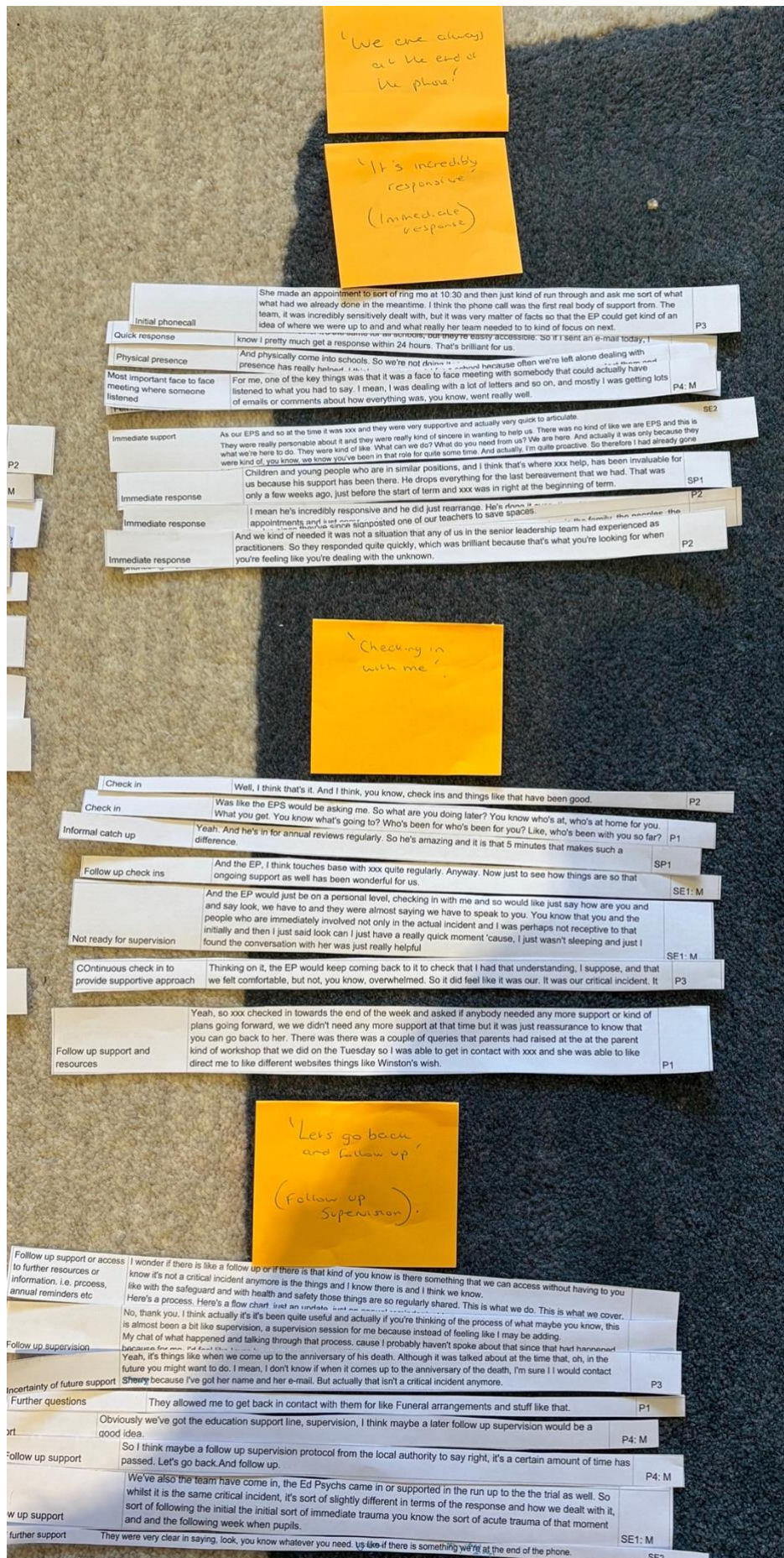
Access to resources	And so some websites and some ideas for support. So I'd sort of put things together, but that was a really helpful thing to happen. So what they did is the key thing they did was listen. Which that was really helpful.	P4: M
Support	Obviously we've got the education support line, supervision, I think maybe a later follow up supervision would be a good idea.	P4: M
Follow up support	So I think maybe a follow up supervision protocol from the local authority to say right, it's a certain amount of time has passed. Let's go back and follow up.	P4: M

Appendix 20: Theme development and review (Phase 4 of RTA)











Appendix 21: Theme refining, defining and naming (Phase 5 of RTA)



- I know there is a plan for this (policies / processes).

is almost been a bit less supervision, a supervision system more or less because instead of feeling like I may be adding
My chat of what happened and taking through this, the process, kinda I probably haven't spoke about that since that has happened
because for me, I feel like I have to be a supervisor, somebody else's idea of this was that was key. So I had a process. I don't can't
and go, yeah, we've got to go and then you've got that and then they don't have a critical incident plan, which is a
I imagine that there might be places where the process they don't have a critical incident plan, which is a
So I kind of feel that like one of the things that would be good from them to have is to have a protocol of
we do to support the school. I think that a lot of letters from different people saying you know, the service is
they all know that they're a bit more unified to say right here from some contacts for this person to meet, you know
they all know that, all research to make that contact

Unfiled approach

Research based protocols

Police and process

Contact details and EPs contact school

Unaware of EP role

Support & Research and overview of this is what an EP covers even if it may be

Permanence features on web

In terms of the response, the critical incident response I'd say the challenge is, I mean we've got our
our protocols and we've got our emergency plan. The issues I had was that I was trying to contact people on numbers that
were updated by the local authority, so therefore you know that I was trying to contact people on numbers that
weren't necessarily the right numbers or people who weren't necessarily the right people

Schools and emergency plan

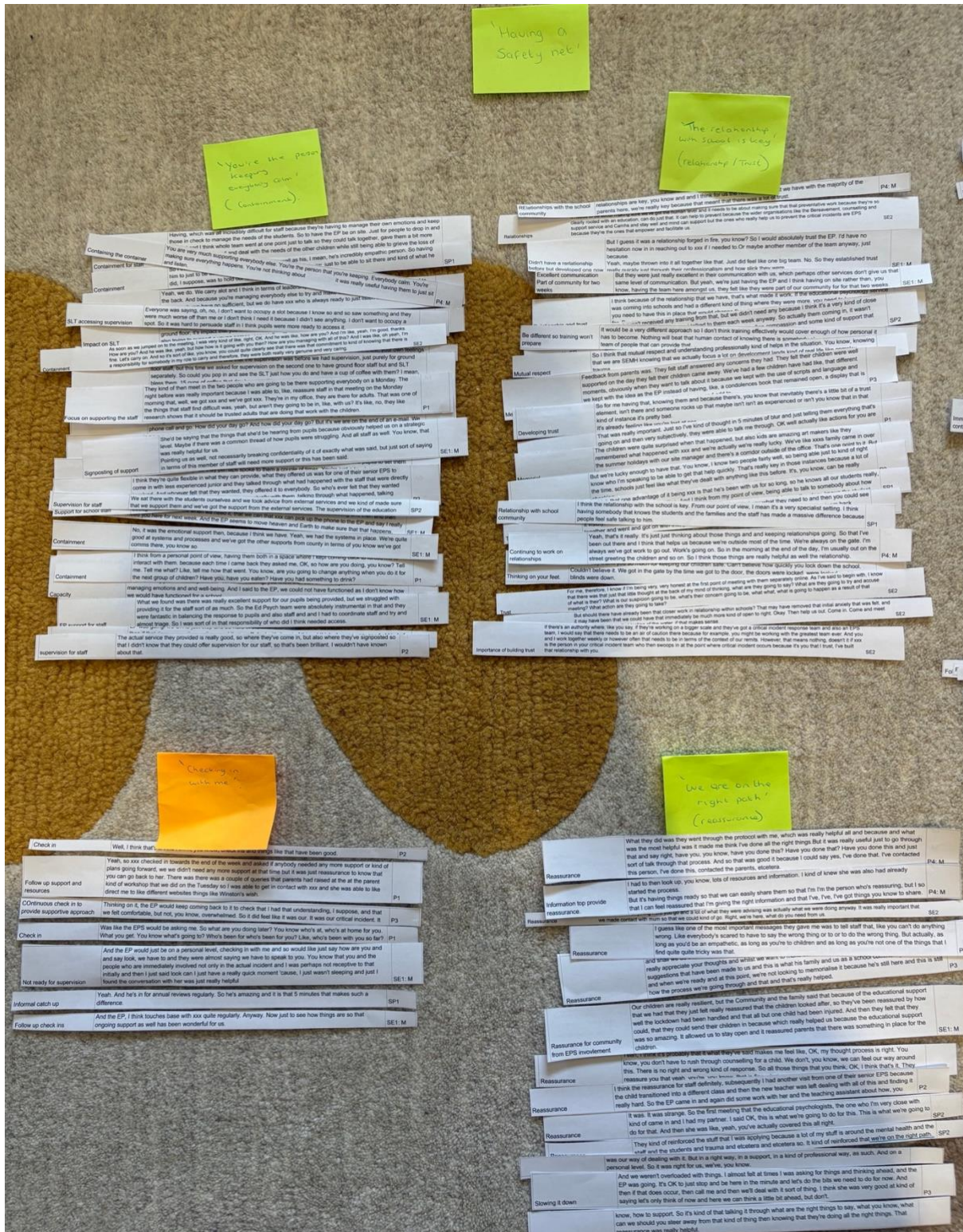
Didn't know what EP role would be but knew what to do

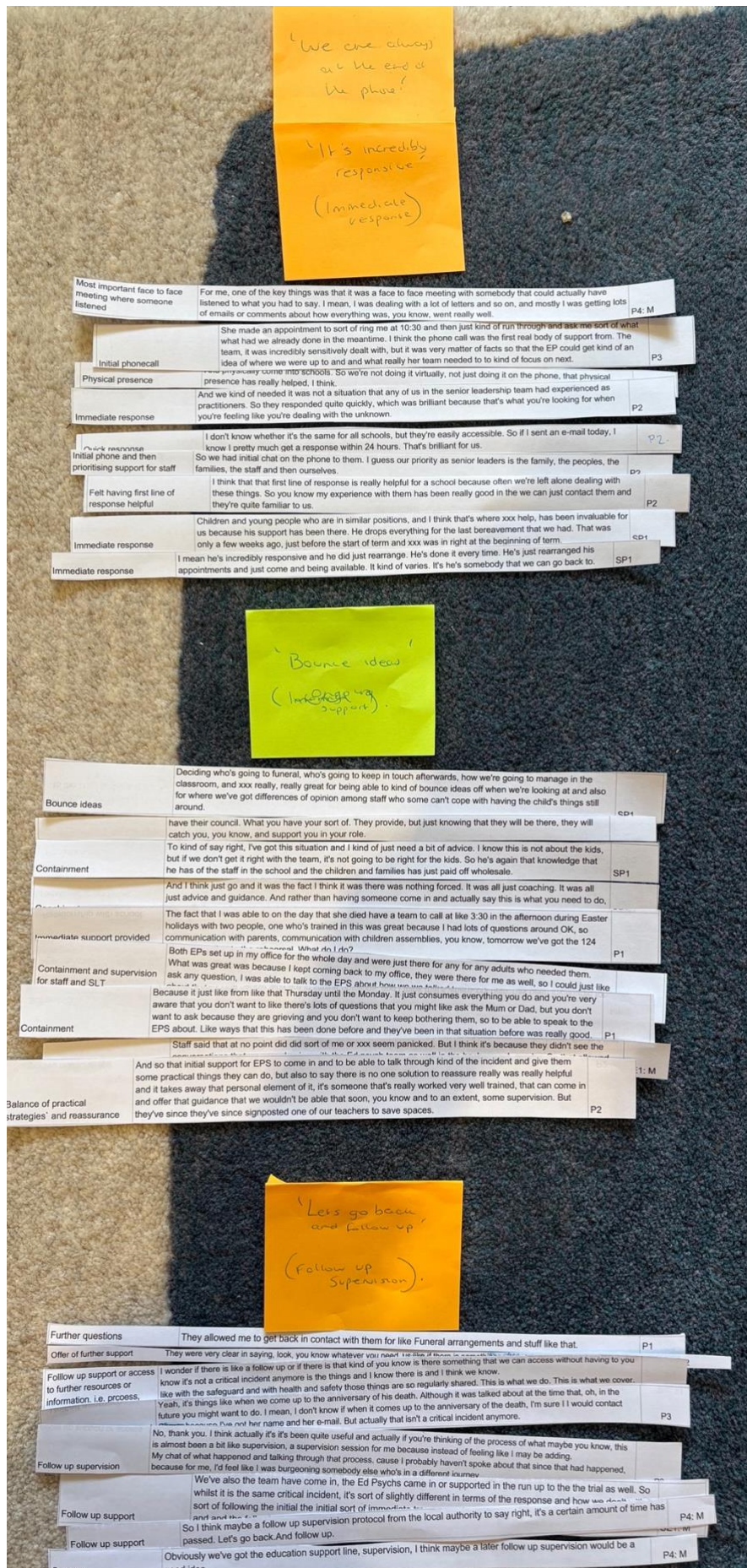
Need role of EP in the policy

I don't really have an understanding. Although I spoke to our executive head who said I know there is a plan this. I know the
critical incident. It's not happened to us, but I know other schools have gone through it. I know we're the EP service and it
have a team and they have a structure for this. Neither of us know or call or we've already had that experience. Neither
of us know this is the structure. It's a bit like a phone number or a website or a meeting or
And even if you don't have in the critical incident policy some
something that could be added on a couple of levels, you know, the EP role will be there to support you, but just relying
on being adaptable. On being adaptable.

It's
incredibly
responsive
(Immediate
response)

Importance of providing a specific support	Psychologists who have an understanding of the level of need about kids, and staff's needs. So I think the biggest thing the advice was about kind of managing the way we work with children between disabilities and and their responses. They sent out a link to a document and it was about sort of good suicide responses. They did offer that and it was sort of that sent against it to an extent so that if they would not have been appropriate for all of these different contextual reasons. So we'd already you know planned out that we were going to have a particular message for all staff.	SP1
Importance of meeting individual needs	Then again being able to have that capacity to maybe, specifically, meet the needs of the children or the staff who need it. Protocol or give advice that post suicide attempt or post critical incident or post death may necessitate.	SE2
Knowledge of SEN/LN	The children who are seen were children who already on all of our radar, who had needs the Ed psych team who are able to, who are to well equipped to deal with children with those needs anyway, that when they were dealing with a critical incident and there's needs, they just knew the best way to support that child.	SE1 M
Supervision for staff and psychology of grief	It provided supervision to staff and myself, myself an awful lot as the work I was doing was very much kind of helping the staff out. And the biggest part on that incident was actually, I'm very theoretical. I'm very much look at the theory, what, what, what, what it does and the empirical evidence and stuff and actually sitting with the specialist in the service you know what it does and the empirical evidence. This is what happens and this is and it helped me process of an awful lot. Which was really beneficial. I think the supervision for in contact with students for staff was more educational. I think the supervision for in contact with students for staff was more educational. I think the supervision for in contact with students for staff was more educational.	SP2
Specialist knowledge of EPs	They the first instant we had two of staff. Linked with our skill, but we had an additional one and it was brilliant and educational. I keep on emailing chat with him, but he was a specialist in critical incidents. And the advice he gave me was amazing. I keep on emailing chat with him, but he was a specialist in critical incidents. And the advice he gave me was amazing. I keep on emailing chat with him, but he was a specialist in critical incidents. And the advice he gave me was amazing.	SP2
Dual approach of supervision and also psychological knowledge of CI	But having the advice and guidance from someone who was a specialist in that area, it may be it's I think it's my mindset. I find that whenever I'm stuck with the challenge, I'll go out of my community of practice and find out what's out there and having someone who's been trained in that really give me a lot of kind of "oh I heard it's safe by just by having someone like that to be able to say 'Yeah, this is what you would normally do when having that conversation'".	SP2
Mutual learning	Reaction from adults around children's grief and around how we could help the children, some children would get in touch with xxx. And I think that's been kind of quite nice because we've been developing our skill sets together.	SP1
EP knows CYP needs	And knows our kids well enough to know what might work when we're trying to support them.	SP1







Appendix 22: Final Thematic Map

