



SUDDEN SAM CHARITY INFORMATION PACK

SCHOOL-BASED EMOTIONAL
SUPPORT (CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE)

Registered charity number – 1207785



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MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER AND CEO



When my brother, Sam, died suddenly, my whole world changed in an instant. One minute, everything was normal – and the next, life as I knew it had been torn apart. In those early days, I was overwhelmed. I didn't know what to do, who to speak to, or how to keep going. I just knew that I didn't want anyone else to feel as lost and alone as I did.

That's why Sudden Sam was created.

When Sam passed, he left behind three young children – Joseph, Alice, and Jack. The impact Sam's death has had on them is one of the reasons we are passionate about supporting children and young people through the storm of sudden loss.

Whether it's the death of a parent, sibling, friend, or loved one – when loss comes without warning, it's devastating. Our school-based therapy is here to help children process that loss, express what they're feeling, and begin to heal – gently, safely, and in a way that makes sense for them.

We work in partnership with schools because we know that's where children spend most of their time – and it's often where the first signs of grief show. With your help, we can make sure pupils who are hurting don't slip through the cracks.

Sudden loss changes lives, but with care and the right kind of support, we can help children carry their grief in a way that feels lighter.



Tom Hanlon
Founder and CEO

WHO IS SUDDEN SAM?



Sudden Sam is a registered charity that provides support to those impacted by sudden death within the Liverpool City Region.

In the wake of a heart-breaking tragedy, Sudden Sam emerged in 2023, honouring the memory of Sam Mercer, who died unexpectedly and suddenly in February, aged just 35.

Sam's family understand the struggle of sudden death all too well. As a family, we struggled to process Sam's death and our grief was compounded by trauma, shock and numbness. The months after Sam's death were traumatic and complex – the complexity of the sudden death delaying the grieving process.

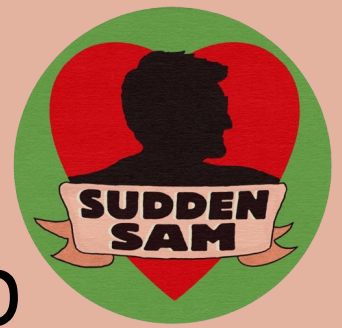
Sudden Sam aims to ensure that we stand as a pillar of strength, offering guidance, emotional support, and financial support to those grappling with the profound aftermath of sudden death. We aim to extend a helping hand to to guide individuals through the darkest of times, proving that, even in the face of sudden loss and immense trauma, there can be hope and healing.

We have four main charitable objectives:

- Emotional Support
- Financial Support
- Practical Guidance
- Community Awareness



Scan this QR code to go to our 'about us' page on our website.



WHAT IS OUR VISION AND MISSION?

VISION

Our vision is that Sudden Sam becomes a beacon of support for those enduring the pain and confusion of sudden loss, ensuring that no one faces the challenges of sudden death alone, thereby promoting healing, unity, and resilience within our community.

MISSION

Our mission is to ensure that, through support from Sudden Sam, families of loved ones who have died suddenly feel supported, both emotionally and financially and that the community, through public awareness, develop a greater understanding and empathy of their suffering.



MEET THE TEAM



Tom Hanlon
Founder /
CEO



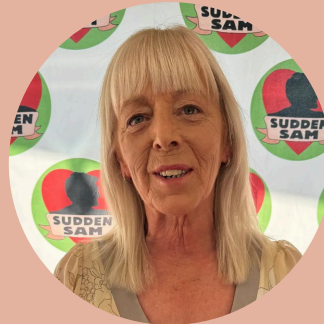
Andrew Mercer
Trustee



Gaynor Shiels
Trustee



Susan Hanlon
Trustee



Paula Mercer
Trustee



Our Counselling Team

We are very fortunate with our counselling team at Sudden Sam. Please scan this QR code to meet the team.

All of our passionate and dedicated counsellors are registered with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and are highly qualified and experienced.



WHY WE OFFER SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS

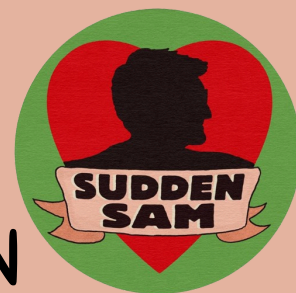
When a child experiences the sudden death of someone they love, the impact ripples through every part of their life – including school. Grief doesn't wait until the end of the day. It walks into classrooms, sits at desks, and shows up in behaviour, concentration, friendships, and learning.

Sudden Loss is Different

Sudden death is not just painful, it's disorienting. There's no time to prepare, no chance to say goodbye, and no warning. The shock can leave children feeling unsafe, confused, angry, or numb. It can affect their emotional regulation, relationships, and overall wellbeing for months or even years.

Schools are Central to Recovery

For many children, school is their most stable environment after a bereavement. Trusted adults, familiar routines, and peer connections offer vital anchors. But teachers aren't therapists – and the support grieving children need often goes beyond what a school can realistically provide on its own. That's where Sudden Sam comes in.



WHY WE OFFER SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS

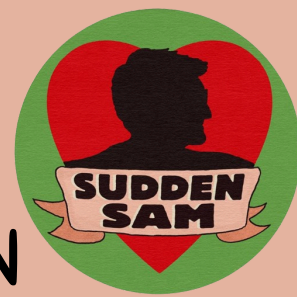
Our Role

We offer specialist therapeutic support in school so that children don't have to carry their grief alone. Our play and art therapists are trained in working with children affected by trauma and sudden loss. They provide a safe, consistent space for children to process their feelings, build emotional resilience, and begin to heal – all without missing school or disrupting their routine.

Our Approach

We believe in working in partnership with schools and families. We don't just drop in for a session and leave – we become part of the wider support network around each child. This includes:

- Liaising with school staff to ensure joined-up care
- Supporting transitions, anniversaries, and key triggers
- Providing advice on how to talk to children about death and loss
- Offering guidance to staff and parents on managing emotional responses in the classroom and at home



WHY WE OFFER SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS

Early Support Matters

Research shows that early intervention reduces long-term emotional and mental health problems. Without it, children may internalise trauma or develop difficulties later in life. By offering timely, targeted support where children already feel safe – in school – we can help prevent that.

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We are powerless to control the losses and catastrophic events our children need to experience, but by honouring their inner wisdom, providing mentors, and creating safe spaces for expression, we can empower them to become more capable, more caring, human beings.

Linda Goldman, Children Also Grieve.

”



OUR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT OFFERING



At Sudden Sam, we provide specialist emotional support to children and young people who have been affected by the sudden death of someone close to them. Our work is rooted in compassion, trauma-awareness, and the belief that the right support, at the right time, can change everything.

What We Offer

Our emotional support services are tailored to meet the unique needs of each child. We currently offer:

- Art Therapy
- Play Therapy
- Talk Therapy

For younger children or those who struggle to express themselves through words, we offer play therapy. Through toys, stories, role play, and games, children can explore their feelings, process trauma, and begin to make sense of what has happened. It's a gentle, child-led approach that helps them build safety and trust.

We also offer art therapy, which allows children and young people to express feelings they might not be able to say out loud. Using drawing, painting, clay, and other creative tools, they can process their grief in symbolic, often deeply personal ways. Art therapy can help reduce anxiety, support emotional regulation, and give a voice to what's too painful to speak.

OUR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT OFFERING



For children and young people who prefer to talk, or who are ready to reflect more directly on their thoughts and feelings, we offer traditional talk therapy. These sessions provide a confidential, non-judgemental space to share what's on their mind – whether that's sadness, anger, guilt, confusion, or fear about the future. Our therapists work at the child's pace, helping them feel heard, understood, and supported.

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In the play therapy experience, toys are the like the child's word, and play is the child's language.

Gary L Landreth, Play Therapy: The Art of the Relationship.

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REFERRAL PROCESS

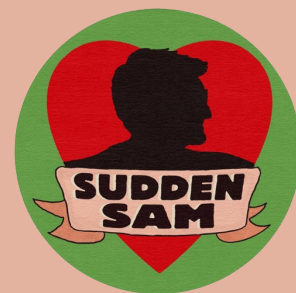
Put simply, Sudden Sam offers emotional support to children and young people if they are enrolled in a school within the Liverpool City Region and the nature of the bereavement is sudden. Our website has detailed information on what we classify as sudden – our advice is to reach out to Sudden Sam if you're unsure.

We've made our referral process simple and straightforward – because when a child is grieving, getting support shouldn't be complicated.

Sudden Sam accepts referrals for emotional support directly from schools or families. We use one referral form, designed to capture all the essential information so that we can respond quickly and appropriately.

Referrals can be made by a parent, carer, or a designated member of school staff (such as a teacher, pastoral lead, SENCO, or safeguarding officer). In either case, the child must attend a school within the Liverpool City Region, and the referral must be made with parental consent.

Once the referral is submitted, our team will review the information and aim to respond within five working days. If the referral meets our criteria for support, we will allocate a therapist and contact the school to arrange a start date. We aim to begin sessions as soon as possible, minimising any wait time for the child.



REFERRAL PROCESS

If a referral does not meet our criteria, we will always provide signposting to other relevant services that may be able to help.

We understand that this may be a difficult time for families and schools, so our process is designed to be accessible, sensitive, and led by compassion. We don't expect anyone to have all the answers – that's what we're here for.

If you're unsure whether a child is eligible or would benefit from support, please get in touch with us. We're happy to talk it.

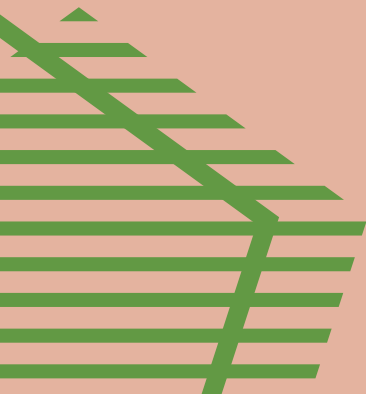
The referral Form can be found on our website.

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The support a child receives after the death of a close loved one can help define the rest of their life. The better that support is, the better the change they can find a way to cope.

Fergus Crow, Chief Executive of Winston's Wish.

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WHAT SCHOOLS NEED TO PROVIDE



For Sudden Sam to deliver effective, consistent support in school, there are a few key things we ask schools to provide. These ensure that therapy sessions run smoothly, safely, and in the best interests of the child.

- **A Suitable Space** – Therapy sessions need to take place in a quiet, private, and uninterrupted space. This can be anywhere the child can feel safe and secure. The room should be available at the same time each week.
 - **A School Point of Contact** – We ask each school to identify a key member of staff who will act as our main point of contact. This person will help coordinate the sessions, communicate with families where appropriate, and be available for brief check-ins with the therapist if needed.
 - **Timetabling Support** – Therapy works best when it's predictable. We ask schools to support with timetabling sessions into the child's week in a way that causes minimal disruption to their learning, while still protecting the therapeutic time as a priority.
 - **Parental Consent** – All referrals must have signed parental or carer consent before sessions begin. We ask schools to support families in understanding what the therapy involves and help complete the referral form if needed.
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WHAT SCHOOLS NEED TO PROVIDE



- Inclusion in Safeguarding Systems – While our therapists are independent, they must be included in the school's safeguarding framework. If a safeguarding concern arises during a session, it will be reported via the school's designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and in line with the school's policy.
- A Grief Informed Approach – We value collaboration. Our therapists may, where appropriate and with consent, share general strategies with staff to help support the child outside of therapy sessions. We ask that schools remain open to this, and where possible, embed grief-informed practices into the wider school culture.

We're here to work alongside schools – not to replace what they do, but to strengthen it. By providing a safe space and a consistent structure, schools play a vital role in helping children feel supported, seen, and understood as they navigate their grief.

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There are 111 newly bereaved children in the UK everyday. The majority of these children will be in school, and school staff can play a huge part with the support they receive.

Child Bereavement UK

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SAFEGUARDING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE



Sudden Sam's Designated Safeguarding Lead is the Founder and CEO, Tom Hanlon.

Sudden Sam, the safety and wellbeing of the children we support is our highest priority. We take safeguarding seriously and operate with clear policies, robust procedures, and professional standards in place to ensure our work is safe, ethical, and effective.

All Sudden Sam therapists are fully trained in safeguarding and hold an enhanced DBS certificate. They receive regular safeguarding supervision and refresher training in line with statutory guidance and best practice.

While our therapists are not employed by the school, they work within the school's safeguarding framework. If a child discloses a concern during a session, the therapist will report it immediately to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and follow the school's internal procedures. Sudden Sam will also record and log all safeguarding concerns within our own secure system.

We believe in transparent, joined-up safeguarding – and we will always work in partnership with schools to ensure children are protected.

SAFEGUARDING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE



Confidentiality

Confidentiality is central to the therapeutic process, but it is never absolute. We explain to children, in age-appropriate terms, that what they say in therapy is private unless we are worried about their safety or someone else's. In those instances, information is shared in line with safeguarding duties.

With consent, therapists may also provide schools and families with general updates on how a child is doing (e.g. engagement, progress, emerging themes). However, detailed content of sessions remains confidential to protect the integrity of the therapeutic space.

Quality Assurance

All of our therapists are qualified, insured, and work under professional codes of conduct. They receive regular clinical supervision from external, accredited supervisors, and are required to engage in continuous professional development (CPD) to keep their practice current and evidence-based. We routinely monitor the quality and impact of our service through feedback from children, families, and schools. We also conduct internal reviews to ensure our support remains safe, effective, and responsive to need.

FAQS



Q. Who qualifies for support?

A. Any child who has been impacted by a sudden death and is enrolled in a school within the Liverpool City Region – it does not matter where the child lives.

Q. What do you class as a sudden passing?

A. Our official definition is 'an unanticipated death in an apparently healthy subject, or in the case of illness, one whose death was not so severe as to predict such an abrupt outcome'. Our advice is to always speak to a member of the team if you are unsure.

Q. What if the death isn't sudden or the child isn't enrolled in a school in the Liverpool City Region?

A. This means that, unfortunately, they do not qualify for Sudden Sam support. This is because we are governed by strict stipulations within our charitable constitution. We will, however, always signpost the school/family to appropriate support.

Q. How do we refer a child or young person?

A. The referral form is on our website and has been designed with ease in mind. If you need support filling it in, a member of the team would be happy to help.

Q. Who can complete the referral?

A. The school or the parent/carer of the child. If the school completes it, parental consent is required. If the parent/carer completes it, the school needs to support the referral in order to facilitate counselling.

FAQS



Q. What type of therapy do you provide?

A. We provide art therapy, play therapy, and talk therapy.

Q. Where does the therapy take place?

A. This type of support is 'school-based'. This means that the therapy takes place in the child's school during their normal school hours. Our therapist travels to the child's school.

Q. How long do the sessions last?

A. Each session is between 45 minutes to 1 hour, depending on what the therapist thinks best during the session. We offer blocks of 8, with 1 session weekly.

Q. Is there a cost to the school and / or family?

A. Absolutely not. Sudden Sam pays the therapists directly.

Q. Is the therapy confidential?

A. Yes – to a point. We explain to children that what they share is private, unless the therapist is worried about their safety or someone else's. In those cases, information will be shared with the school's safeguarding lead, and parents/carers may be informed.

Q. What happens at the end of the sessions?

A. The therapist completes a brief summary sheet (nothing confidential) to state how the child engaged. At the end of the block of sessions, the therapist completes a report on the child's counselling journey.

If you would like to know more information about who we are and what we do, please do not hesitate to reach out to us via the contact details on the cover of this booklet.



Please scan this QR code to read all of our policies.

