

Critical Management Policy

Policy Statement

School principals are responsible for planning for and managing critical incidents that directly affect the school community.

Planning for emergencies and critical incidents

All schools are required to have a current emergency management plan that contains the four components of preparedness, prevention, response and recovery.

Managing emergencies and critical incidents

School principals must work with emergency services, central and regional offices of the Department, and other relevant professionals when responding to and managing a critical incident. Management of a critical incident includes, but is not limited to:

- Reducing the risk of injury or harm to the school community, both in the immediate and long-term response
- Reporting critical incidents to the relevant DET units and emergency services
- Ensuring appropriate and ongoing support is provided to students and staff affected by the incident
- Reviewing the school's Emergency Management Plan and updating where required
- Documenting all action taken in response to the incident

Rationale

Occasionally schools will face a crisis situation that affects the school and community. These are called 'Critical Incidents'. At any time of the day a critical incident may occur at the school creating a situation where staff, students and parents feel strong emotions, unsafe, vulnerable and under stress, which have the potential to overwhelm their ability to cope, either then or later. The early identification of a potential/actual critical incident will help in creating a situation where the grieving process can begin, where students, staff and parents can talk about the situation in terms of readjustment and acceptance. If a critical incident is not addressed adequately, a significant amount of unresolved grief can develop within the individual regardless of age. Unresolved grief can lead to severe emotional difficulties, physical illness and contribute to a crisis later in life.

Implementation

RESPONDING TO A TRAUMATIC OR CRITICAL INCIDENT IN WHICH THE SCHOOL IS INVOLVED

Croydon Hills may become directly or indirectly involved in a tragic or traumatic event. The incident may involve loss of life, serious injury or emotional disturbance. The incident may occur in the school environment or outside. It may involve staff, students or those close to them. The network of those involved in a traumatic event can be wide, especially if it directly involves the school. Feelings of grief and loss can continue over long periods of time.

Counselling should be provided for all those who need it. This may include many who do not seem to be closely connected to the event or the individuals involved. The school may be in a position to help grieving families at difficult times, e.g. through the school's participation in the funeral service.

While school should operate as normally as possible, some degree of flexibility should exist. It is essential that people be given clear, accurate information at all times. It is essential that a Critical Incident Recovery Team be formed to manage the short and long term effects.

ACTION TO BE TAKEN AS A RESULT OF A TRAGIC/TRAUMATIC EVENT WHICH INVOLVES THE SCHOOL

Incidents vary in complexity. These guidelines provide a framework for action and would not necessarily be followed in all cases.

However, the following 4 principles must be followed:

1. provide clear, accurate information
2. describe the actions to be followed
3. provide help for all affected
4. maintain a normal school program as close as possible

Obtain accurate information. Deal only with substantiated facts.

As soon as possible inform staff, especially those most directly involved. Inform close friends and family individually. Allow questions and discussion as they arise. Dispel rumours.

Appoint a skilled Critical Incident Recovery Team to assist in the management of the incident. The team may include staff members, psychologists, counsellors, external DET personnel, support agencies etc. The size and composition of the team will be related to the nature of the incident. Distribute names of the Critical Incident Recovery Team members, and inform others of the role of the team.

As soon as possible provide information to the community as to what has happened, and what is being done.

Appoint a skilled Critical Incident Recovery Team member to respond to media enquires. A written press release may be useful. If necessary, protect others from contact with the media. Advice regarding this may be obtained from the DET Emergency Communications Centre and the DET Media Unit.

Establish an open line of contact with the family or families directly involved.

Provide out of school hours contact if necessary. This could be as simple as circulating the Principal's telephone number. In more complex situations it may mean maintaining telephone contact at the school.

Continue contact with the family to identify their expectations of the school, e.g. student participation in funeral or memorial service.

Try to identify those most likely to need help, e.g. classmates, teacher, special friends. Some students not directly affected may become distressed.

Ensure that counselling help is available. Contact the Regional Office and/or DET if necessary. All emergency or criminal activity, in which the safety or well-being of staff or students is at risk, or where there is a threat to property, must be reported immediately to the Department's 24 hour Emergency and Security Management Branch on **(03) 9589 6266**.

Continue to keep staff, students and parents/carers informed, especially about what has happened and what the school is doing about it.

As soon as possible call students together and provide information about what has happened and what the school is doing about it. A follow up letter home may be important.

Provide counselling services for all. Ensure that there are suitable places in which this can take place. Be prepared to modify the timetable and other arrangements so that people are free to make use of available help.

The class teacher may be the person to whom students first turn for help.

Children wishing to attend funerals should do so in the company of their parents/carers. Provide meaningful participation for those not actually attending the service.

Continue normal routines at school but acknowledge the effect of tragedy on the school community. Be flexible with those in need of help. Be aware that many people may be deeply affected, e.g. an event may cause a person to recall some traumatic event involving them in the past. The anniversary may also be a difficult time.

Maintain links with the family. The school and family may wish to develop a memorial garden, erect a memorial plaque, or display a photo in a prominent position in the school.

Be sensitive to staff and student's needs over a period of time.

LINKS AND APPENDICES (including processes related to this policy)

Links which are connected with this policy are:

- [DET Emergency Management Planning](#)
- [Emergency and Critical Incident](#)
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EVALUATION

Evaluation of the Plans will follow any critical incident at the school.