



RESPONDING TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT

PURPOSE

The College 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. The purpose of this policy is to ensure the safety of students and staff and provide immediate and ongoing support if necessary.

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

Contact must be made with the DET Emergency Service team and SSSO support sought. 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.

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

- 2.1 Incidents vary in complexity. These guidelines provide a framework for action and would not necessarily be followed in all cases.
- 2.2 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
- 2.3 Obtain accurate information. Deal only with substantiated facts.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 Appoint a skilled Critical Incident Recovery Team to assist in the management of the incident. The team may include staff members, psychologists, counsellors, external DEECD 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.
- 2.6 As soon as possible provide information to the community as to what has happened, and what is being done.
- 2.7 Appoint a skilled Critical Incident Recovery Team member to respond to media enquiries. 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.
- 2.8 Establish an open line of contact with the family or families directly involved.

- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 Continue contact with the family to identify their expectations of the school, e.g. student participation in funeral or memorial service.
- 2.11 Try to identify those most likely to need help, e.g. classmates, teacher, special friends. Some students not directly affected may become distressed.
- 2.12 Ensure that counselling help is available. Contact the Area 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.
- 2.13 Continue to keep staff, students and parents informed especially about what has happened and what the school is doing about it.
- 2.14 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.
- 2.15 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.
- 2.16 The class teacher may be the person to whom students first turn for help.
- 2.17 Children wishing to attend funerals should do so in the company of their parents. Provide meaningful participation for those not actually attending the service.
- 2.18 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.
- 2.19 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.
- 2.20 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

Appendices which are connected with this policy are:

- Appendix A: Critical Incident Recovery Plan (CIRP)
- Appendix B: Critical or Traumatic Incident Plan – First 24 hour Short Term Tasks
- Appendix C: Emergency Message Record Form – Template

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Next update: May 2020

Appendix A

Critical Incident Recovery Plan (CIRP)

Responsibilities and Procedures

1. PLAN STATEMENT

This Plan is an integral part of the Emergency Management processes of the school.

2. IMPLEMENTATION

2.1 The Recovery Team will be responsible for coordinating and implementing the Plan (refer to 4.3 for the composition of the team).

It will need to consider:

- establishing the facts as soon as possible
- developing an action plan of short, medium and long term tasks
- contact with the Department of Education (DET)
- liaising with external bodies including the media
- communicating with the whole staff as soon as possible
- meeting with staff both as a whole and with individuals or groups for debriefing
- communicating with the student body
- meeting with students in groups or individually for debriefing
- contacting parents/guardians
- short term and long term counselling requirements for groups or individuals

The relevance of each of the above will depend on factors such as the nature and magnitude of the incident, the intensity of the impact on the School community and the number of people affected.

3. DEBRIEFING

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing has three components:

- initial discussion about feelings and an assessment of the intensity of the stress responses
- detailed discussion of signs and symptoms of stress responses
- closing stage - provides overview and information with referral to an outside agency if required

3.1 The Recovery Team will assist the Principal to facilitate the recovery of staff and students and those of the School community affected by the critical incident.

3.2.1 The debriefing meeting of the Recovery Team should include a mental health professional and one peer who were not involved in the incident.

3.2.2 The Recovery Team will decide the structure and composition of debriefing meetings; such meetings should be held within eight hours of the critical incident. These meetings will review the impressions and reactions of the persons involved during or following the incident.

3.3 Counselling support and referrals for students and their families will be provided initially by the Principal or their nominee and a Regional Guidance Officer.

4. REVIEW

4.1 The Recovery Team will meet to review the implementation of the Critical Incident Recovery Plan within **seventy two (72) hours** of the critical incident.

4.2 As part of the Critical Incident Recovery Plan, the Principal will set up a Recovery Team at the beginning of each year.

4.3 Following a critical incident, the Principal will convene the Recovery Team as soon as possible.

The composition of the Recovery Team may include:

- the Principal
- the Assistant Principal
- a member of the teaching staff
- a member of the Educational Support staff (first aid trained)
- Wellbeing staff
- as necessary, psychologists, counsellors and DEECD personnel.

4.4 The Principal will convene the Recovery Team once each semester to review planning and strategies for the Critical Incident Recovery Plan.

5. EVALUATION

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

Critical or Traumatic Incident Plan – First 24 hour Short Term Tasks

Responsibilities and Procedures

1. EMERGENCY RECORD

Record Information

- nature of the incident
- location of the incident, number and names of persons involved
- name of the person reporting the incident
- time incident reported
- contact telephone number if away from school

Verify all Details

- confirm that the information given about the event is accurate

Record the Incident

- notify principal workplace coordinator
- ensure emergency services have been called notify the Department's 24 hour Emergency Communications Centre on **(03) 9589 6266**.

2. ENSURE STUDENTS AND STAFF ARE SAFE FROM HARM OR INJURY

- Administration, Community and Neighbourhood Leaders cordon off any 'crisis' area and keep students away from there
- manage the grounds while staff are briefed and ensure media do not intrude
- check corridors, toilets etc for stray students - try to prevent students leaving on their own particularly if distressed
- send all very stressed students to a nominated Recovery area
- ensure the school continues as normally as possible

3. ESTABLISH CRITICAL INCIDENT RECOVERY TEAM

The composition of the Recovery Team may be:

- the Principal
- the Assistant Principal
- a member of the teaching staff
- a member of the Educational Support staff (first aid trained)
- Wellbeing Staff
- as necessary, psychologists, counsellors and DET personnel.

4. ALLOCATE RESPONSIBILITIES

- source emergency contact list
- evacuation and assembly of staff and students
- cordon off area of 'crisis'
- establish a Support Team and Communications Centre to:
 - manage information and phone calls
 - coordinate media requests for information
 - provide information to parents arriving at school
 - coordinate routine school activities – maintain where practical
 - notify students, staff and ancillary about the emergency
 - notify parents first, and then siblings in the school
 - establish a recovery room and supervisor for affected students
 - establish a waiting room for parents
 - inform students
 - inform School Council
 - inform School Community by newsletter
 - monitor School Community's reactions
 - liaise with outside agencies and emergency services
 - brief key personnel and review responses

4.1 Recovery Room(s)

Set Up Recovery Room

- set up room to be allocated as Recovery Room
- empty adjoining rooms if possible and relocate to other rooms
- screen windows
- have available pens, textas, paper, scissors, envelopes, tissues

Appoint Recovery Room Supervisors

- Wellbeing, First Aid staff

Recovery Room Supervisors' Responsibilities

- keep calm
- monitor students for shock reactions, provide first aid if necessary
- encourage students to gather in small friendship groups rather than bigger ones
- keep a list of students attending the recovery room
- give the students a task to undertake such as making a card or writing a letter
- contact parents of students who remain in the recovery room and alert them to possible concerns

5. INFORMING STAFF

- provide teachers and ancillary staff with a brief outline of the incident
- Restate to ensure that staff fully comprehend situation
- outline recovery management arrangements
- discuss procedures to be followed by staff during the day
- discuss the general procedures that Critical Incident Team will be following
- discuss guidelines for informing students and ways of answering questions from them
- give staff time to discuss this among themselves
- provide a brief factual outline to others in the community on a need to know basis
- inform staff as soon as possible about a serious emergency involving death or injury which occurs after hours, on the weekend or during the school holidays
- inform staff as soon as possible about arrangements for holding a brief meeting before informing students at the start of the next school day
- review with staff afterwards any issues and needs
- provide staff with contact numbers for counselling or support services for themselves

6. INFORMING STUDENTS

Principal or senior staff

- contact the bereaved family or police to ascertain what information may be released within the school
- prepare a written factual statement, without graphic detail, for use as a reference by teachers when discussing the incident with students
- determine whether to tell students about the incident at a whole school assembly, by year levels or individual classes, depending on the nature of the incident
- discuss with teachers who feel uncomfortable raising the event with students and arrange for support from another teacher or a member of the recovery team
- identify staff who may be too distraught to take classes and arrange replacements
- inform students soon after briefing staff
- ask teachers to mark a roll to identify who has been informed and who has not

Teachers

- provide a factual account of the incident at the beginning of the first class in a way that ensures all students hears the same information
- limit speculation and rumours
- inform students about arrangements of counselling and recovery rooms
- inform students about arrangements for services, and appropriate ways to express condolences
- outline the arrangements for the day

Notifying close friends

- notify close friends as soon as possible
- take these students aside when they arrive at school and inform them privately
- consider contacting their parents
- ensure individual attention is given to intimate friends who are likely to have special needs beyond those of other students

7. COMMUNICATION CENTRE

Organise the following to be on hand:

- telephone
- telephone message if necessary
- message records
- phone lists
- rolls
- excursion list
- timetable
- maps
- computer and printer
- photocopier
- display instructions

8. MEDIA COVERAGE

- nominate a media coordinator, prepare the School Council President and Principal to provide on camera interviews
- contact DEECD Media Unit on 9637 2871 or 9264 5821
- prepare a three paragraph report:
 - briefly outline the facts
 - outline what the school has done to assist those affected
 - outline support and recovery arrangements
 - include a name and contact number for the school media coordinator
- liaise with the family about any statements made to media
- exclude discussion of policy matters, limit comment to the emergency and the school response
- set rules for persistent media
- keep a record of media enquiries
- offer scheduled interviews in return for media commitment not to seek uninvited access to staff, students, parents
- negotiate accepted areas for filming e.g. school/church boundary and not within
- check that information provided does not conflict with court requirements or police proceedings
- anticipate renewed interest arising from anniversaries, court proceedings

9. LONG TERM ACTIONS

- monitor and support members of the school community, particularly on significant dates such as anniversaries
- consider longer term intervention activities such as counselling or specialist support
- consider establishing an area within the school as a place of remembrance
- reconvene key people at regular intervals to review the school response and effectiveness of planning arrangements
- review the school emergency management plan in light of experience gained
- consider a ritual of marking significant dates
- prepare for legal proceedings if necessary
- remove students name from the roll if deceased
- consider article in school magazine
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Emergency Record Form – Template

Date: / __ /

Time of notification: __ _____ am/pm

Name of person taking the call:

Position:

Name of person reporting the incident:

Contact telephone number:

Details

Describe:

Where everyone is now?

What action is being taken to help?

Who:

When:

Where:

How:

Nature and extent of the injury:

Immediate Actions Required

Principal notified? 0423 936 829 Yes Time: _____ : _____ am/pm

Other school staff? Yes Time: _____ : _____ am/pm

Emergency Services notified? 132 500 Yes Time: _____ : _____ am/pm

Emergency & Security Management notified?
(03) 9589 6266 Yes Time: _____ : _____ am/pm

Emergency Contact Telephone Numbers

POLICE 000

AMBULANCE 000

FIRE BRIGADE 000

STATE EMERGENCY SERVICES (SES) 132 500

LOCAL HOSPITAL - Bendigo Base Hospital (03) 5454 6000

EMERGENCY SECURITY MANAGEMENT (03) 9589 6266

Emergency Message Record Form

Time: ____ : ____ : am/pm

Message from:

Action required?

Yes

No

If 'YES', please detail:

Completed

Message taken by:

Emergency Message Record Form

Time: ____ : ____ : am/pm

Message from:

Action required?

Yes

No

If 'YES', please detail:

Completed

Message taken by:

FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

PROTECT



YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

- As a school staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children in your care.
- You **must** act, by following the 4 critical actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
 - You **must** act if you form a **suspicion** or reasonable belief, even if you are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).
 - You **must** use the **Responding to Suspected Child Abuse** template to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

*A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and take action.

1 RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY

If there is no risk of immediate harm go to **Action 2**.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm you **must** ensure their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved
- administering first aid
- calling **000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance** to immediate health or safety concerns
- Identifying a contact person at the school for future liaison with Police.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you **must** report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

Q: Where does the source of suspected abuse come from?

WITHIN THE SCHOOL

VICTORIA POLICE
You **must** report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report internally to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
 - School Principal and/or leadership team
 - Employee Conduct Branch
 - DET Security Services Unit
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
 - School Principal and/or leadership team
 - Diocesan education office
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
 - School Principal and/or school chairperson

For suspected student sexual assault, please follow the **Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending**.

WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION
You **must** report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:

- in need of protection from child abuse
- at risk of being harmed (or has been harmed) and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the child's safety, stability or development.

VICTORIA POLICE

You **must also** report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report internally to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
You **must also** report to:
 - School Principal and/or leadership team
 - DET Security Services Unit
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
You **must also** report to:
 - School Principal and/or leadership team
 - Diocesan education office
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
You **must also** report to:
 - School Principal and/or chairperson

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold **significant concerns** for their wellbeing you must still act. This may include making a referral or seeking advice from Child FRST (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your Principal **must** consult with DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- not to contact the parents/ carer** (e.g. in circumstances where the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse, or the child is a mature minor and does not wish for their parent/carer to be contacted)
- to contact the parents/carers** and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion).

4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school **must** provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include the development of a **Student Support Plan** in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements. Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals.

You **must** follow the **Four Critical Actions** every time you become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

CONTACT

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

AREA
North Division **1300 664 977**
South Division **1300 655 795**
East Division **1300 360 391**
West Division (Rural) **1800 075 599**
West Division (Metro) **1300 664 977**

AFTER HOURS
After hours, weekends, public holidays **13 1278**

CHILD FIRST
www.dhs.vic.gov.au

VICTORIA POLICE
000 or your local police station

DET SECURITY SERVICES UNIT

(03) 9589 6286

STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT

(03) 9651 3622

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH

(03) 9637 2595

DIOCESAN OFFICE

Melbourne (03) 9287 0228
Ballarat (03) 5337 7135
Sale (03) 5622 6600
Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

VICTORIA
(03) 9825 7200

