

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT POLICY

DEFINITION

Any situation faced by members of a school community causing them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the time of the situation or later.

RATIONALE

It is as impossible to predict the type of critical incident which might destabilise a school as it is to predict when an incident might occur. Natural forces and tragic circumstances are generally beyond control. A general response can however be outlined, based on historical precedents and satisfactory responses developed by those schools unfortunate enough to have had to activate a response.

RESPONSE

This will be contingent on the type of incident experienced.

EMERGENCIES

The essential elements of our response will involve, as prioritised:

1. the safety of students and staff
2. activation of the Critical Incident team by the co-ordinator designate
3. liaison with medical, police, state emergency services etc.
4. procuring essential information on the incident for dissemination to staff, and students and parents
5. alerting district superintendent
6. alerting DET
7. allocation of responsibilities to meet various individual and group needs resource and timetable variations
8. outline for the school's action plan
9. closure ceremonies
10. de-briefing of Critical Incident team members

THE ROLE OF THE CO-ORDINATOR

(The co-ordinator of the plan and the person responsible for the initiation of the plan is the Principal or the Principal's replacement i.e. Deputy Principal,

SUCH ACTION TO BE TAKEN BY PRINCIPAL/PRINCIPAL'S REPLACEMENT OR DESIGNATES.

- initiate and supervise the Crisis Management Plan
- determine immediate course of action depending on circumstances
- gather factual information on the crisis
- arrange for contact with emergency services if required

- arrange and chair a brief meeting of Executive and Student Welfare staff (as a matter of urgency) to consider implementation of action plan
- formulate a statement for staff and students
- arrange and chair a meeting of all staff to inform them of the situation and to advise re: action to be taken
- be the only school contact with the media
- contact parents of students directly involved
- liaise with external authorities e.g. police, ambulance etc
- collect and impart particulars of those involved to authorities where necessary e.g. excursion accident
- contact parents where responsibility does not involve external authorities e.g. police involved in case of fatalities.
- arrange meetings in roll or year groups to enable staff to speak to students about the incident.
- arrange staff assistance in de-briefing room/s as requested by student welfare team

ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

The Principal will assume responsibility for a number of areas of organisation -

- contact the district superintendent to relate details of the crisis and the strategies in place
- contact the school counsellor
- determine staffing needs in de-briefing room(s) with welfare team
- make arrangements for extra casual staff where necessary
- arrange for ancillary staff to contact parents
- directly supervise the involvement of Head Teachers in the implementation of the action plan - see "Role of Head Teachers" section
- supervise/brief ancillary staff

Role of the Deputy Principals.

- meet with other Welfare team members and Executive to consider management of crisis
- co-ordinate activities in designated de-briefing room(s)
- supervise welfare aspects of the action plan
- record "at risk" students and staff members nominated by welfare team and/or class teachers
- chair meeting with school welfare team and community health representatives
- arrange de-briefing at end of day for staff
- co-ordinate any aspects of the plan involving roll checks.

ROLE OF HEAD TEACHERS

- mobilise extra staff (not teaching at the time) where possible to assist in any way required
- be mobile around the school throughout the day to assist staff in handling any problems arising
- supervise and ensure sensible evacuation procedures of school buildings if necessary
- liaise with other executive to discover areas of need (where indicated).

ROLE OF YEAR ADVISERS

- meet with other Welfare team members and Executive to consider management of crisis in short and long term
- identify students 'at risk' and record names of all students with "special needs" identified during the day
- direct students with special needs to designated de-briefing room(s)
- return "special needs" student list and comments to Deputy Principal.

ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELLOR

- meet with other Welfare team members and Executive to consider management of crisis in short and long term
- co-ordinate counselling activities in de-briefing room(s)
- contact Community Health to inform them of the crisis and arrange for them to visit the school to discuss needs/assist in management of the situation
- assist Community Health staff in assessing readiness of students involved to return to school
- assist Deputy Principal with debriefing

ROLE OF ROLL CLASS TEACHERS

- pass on information to students in their roll class regarding the incident (as provided by the Co-ordinator) - perhaps Year Meetings
- dispersion of correct information
- observe students in their groups and contact Student Welfare team if concerned that they may need assistance
- list students 'at risk' - refined or added to over a period of time e.g. within 24 hours, 48-72 hours or in the longer term.

ROLE OF ANCILLARY STAFF

(Senior to co-ordinate)

- contact parents of students who need to go home
- handle enquiries from parents (NOT MEDIA)

DE-BRIEFING ROOM

Designated on the day by Co-ordinator e.g. Staff Commonroom, Gym, School Counsellor's room or room/rooms which may be appropriate.

EVALUATION

- all "role" personnel directly involved in a critical incident are required to contribute to a final evaluation of management procedures as directed by co-ordinator.

A CHECKLIST

WHAT TO DO AFTER A CRITICAL INCIDENT AFFECTS A SCHOOL

These action steps are not intended as comprehensive lists of administrative procedures but rather as a quick reference for key personnel in planning to meet the immediate and longer term welfare needs of students, staff and others should a critical incident affect a school. For any given circumstances the relevance of each step will depend on factors such as the nature and magnitude of the incident, the intensity of the impact on the school community or on individuals, the number of people affected and the extent of personal injury, loss of life and loss or property.

NOTE: NOT ALL STEPS MAY BE NECESSARY

WITHIN 24 HOURS AFTER THE INCIDENT

1) FIND OUT THE FACTS

Collect information about the incident from reliable sources as soon as possible.

2) ESTABLISH A CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

Convene an urgent meeting of the executive and student welfare staff and support personnel.
Determine if additional support from helping agencies is needed.

3) INFORM ALL STAFF

Provide the facts of the incident Outline the propose Crisis Management Plan. Suggest sources of personal support for teachers.

4) INFORM ALL STUDENTS

Outline the facts of the incident at the earliest opportunity.

5) SET UP A COUNSELLING/DE-BRIEFING ROOM(S) IN THE SCHOOL

Provide where possible, tea/coffee, comfortable chairs and an appropriate support person. Allow distressed student and staff access to these

room(s) for several days after the incident.

6) LIAISE WITH THE MEDIA

If necessary, appoint a staff member as media liaison person. Minimise media contact with staff and students and provide the media with clear guidelines for making any contact with staff or students.

WITHIN 48 - 72 HOURS AFTER THE INCIDENT

1) RESTORE SCHOOL TO REGULAR ROUTINE

Provide structure to help students and staff return to normal functioning.

2) ENCOURAGE TEACHERS TO ALLOW STUDENTS (ESPECIALLY THOSE MORE DIRECTLY INVOLVED) OPPORTUNITIES TO TALK ABOUT THE INCIDENT AND ABOUT THEIR REACTIONS.

This is an important part of the recovery process but should not be forced on students.

3) KEEP PARENTS INFORMED ABOUT

- * the school's Crisis Management plan
- * possible reactions of students
- * sources of help for families.

4) ENCOURAGE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND SCHOOL

DURING THE FIRST MONTH

Arrange appropriate formal ceremonies e.g a Memorial Service, at School within a week of the incident.

Encourage close friends and others directly involved in the incident to participate and be involved in the planning.

Encourage students to attend ceremonies.

Convene a meeting of parents of students involved in the incident after 3 or 4 weeks. (where a number of students were directly involved)

Involve counselling professionals to encourage parents to express and share their feelings and concerns about their children's welfare and to help them understand their reactions.

IN THE LONGER TERM

Monitor staff and students for signs of undue stress.

Encourage stressed staff and students to seek professional help.

Try to provide a supportive environment.

**BE ALERT FOR AND SENSITIVE TO THE DISTURBING INFLUENCES OF
ANNIVERSARIES, INQUESTS AND LEGAL PROCEEDINGS.**

Special support for those affected may be needed again at these times.

Make extra staff and services available if necessary.