



Critical Incident Policy

Responding to a traumatic or critical incident in which the school is involved

The school 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.¹ 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 is/will 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 also 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 a Critical Incident Recovery Team be formed to manage the short and long term effects and provide clear, accurate information at all times.

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:

- provide clear, accurate information
- describe the actions to be followed
- provide help for all affected
- 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. The names of the Critical Incident Recovery Team members will be distributed and the role of the team will be explained to others.

¹ Critical incidents which occur abroad may be very relevant to International Students e.g. Tsunami in China



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 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.

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

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. 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.

Continue to keep staff, students and parents 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.

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

Continue normal routines at school but acknowledge the effect of the tragedy upon 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.

- 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

Reference

- DET's Managing School Emergencies - Minimising the impact of trauma on staff and students

This policy was ratified by School Council in May 2018.