



## **CRITICAL INCIDENTS POLICY**

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

Hurstbridge 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 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 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**

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 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.

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 DEECD Emergency Communications Centre and the DEECD Media Unit.

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

Provide out of school hours contact if necessary. 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 DEECD 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 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. 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**

Links which are connected with this policy are:

[DEECD 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

## **EVALUATION**

Evaluation of the Critical Incident Plan will follow any critical incident at the school.

## **APPENDIX A: Critical Incident Response Plan (CIRP): *Responsibilities and Procedures***

This plan is an integral part of the Emergency Management Policy of the school (Appendix B of the *Emergency Management Plan*)

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

The Recovery Team will be responsible for coordinating and implementing the CIRP.

#### **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 and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)
- 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.

### **DEBRIEFING**

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing has three components:

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

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.

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

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.

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

### **REVIEW**

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

As part of the Critical Incident Recovery Plan, the Principal will set up a Recovery Team at the beginning of each year. This will be published in the school's *Emergency Management Plan – Incident Management Team*.

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

## **APPENDIX B: CRITICAL or TRAUMATIC INCIDENT PLAN**

### ***(First 24 Hours – Short Term Tasks)***

#### **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 & STAFF ARE SAFE FROM HARM OR INJURY:**

- student Managers and Year Level Coordinators 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 the Recovery area in the Library
- ensure that students do not make hysterical calls out of school
- ensure the school continues as normally as possible

#### **3. ESTABLISH CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM:**

Refer to school's Emergency Management Plan – Incident Response Team. Team should comprise of, but is not limited to:

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Leading Teacher/s
- Student Wellbeing Officer
- Regional Guidance Officers
- First Aid Staff
- Regional Network Staff

#### **4. ALLOCATE RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- emergency message register

- 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

## **5. RECOVERY ROOM/S:**

### *Set Up Recovery Room*

- set up Library, and if necessary the Staffroom
- empty adjoining rooms if possible and relocate to other rooms
- screen windows
- have available pens, textas, paper, scissors, envelopes, tissues

### *Appoint Recovery Room Supervisor/s*

- Student Wellbeing Officer
- First Aid staff as needed

### *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

## **6. INFORMING STAFF:**

- provide teachers and ancillary staff with a brief outline of the incident
- Restate to ensure that staff understand and it sinks in

- 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

## **7. 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 prior to making an announcement to other students
- take these students aside when they arrive at school and inform them privately
- consider contacting their parents
- prior to the start of the day
- ensure individual attention is given to intimate friends who are likely to have special needs beyond those of other students

## **8. COMMUNICATION CENTRE:**

### *Organise the following to be on hand:*

- telephone - dedicated line in case of jamming by incoming calls
- telephone message if necessary
- message records
- phone lists
- rolls
- excursion list
- timetable
- maps
- computer and printer
- photocopier
- Emergency Management Plan instructions

## **9. MEDIA COVERAGE:**

- nominate a media coordinator, prepare the School Council President and Principal to provide on camera interviews
- confirm with DEECD whether the school is authorised to make comment
- 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
- fax to chiefs of staff of major media outlets:
  - Leader Fax: (03) 5227 4330 Phone: (03) 5227 4300
  - The Age Fax: (03)8667 2327 Phone: (03) 8667 2000
  - Herald Sun Fax: (03) 9292 2080 Phone: (03) 9292 1226
- liaise with the family about any statements made to media