



# Critical Incident Policy

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## **Introduction**

Schools are normally very stable and orderly communities where children thrive even when events outside the school are less certain. However, from time to time, events come along which require a school to make special arrangements to enable them to manage a 'critical incident'. This plan sets out the details of how our school will deal with such a situation should the need ever arise. At all times the plan will balance the management of the incident with meeting the needs of the whole school community. This plan has been set out in three phases - Before, During and After the incident.

### **Before the Incident**

#### **Definition of a 'Critical Incident'**

A critical incident is: "any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within the school community and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of that school."

#### **Types of Critical Incidents**

Incidents that have affected schools:

- Sudden death of pupil or member of staff;
- Disappearance of a pupil or member of staff;
- Death or injury of a pupil or staff member on a school outing;
- Severe injury to pupil or staff member as a result of a road traffic accident;
- Serious assault on pupil or staff member in school;
- Violent/disturbed intruder on school premises during school day;
- Serious damage to school building or property through fire, flood or vandalism;
- Civil disturbance in local community;
- Pupil with serious contagious illness;
- Immediate evacuation of the school with no likelihood of return for a number of hours

#### **Key Tasks**

The school has established a Critical Incident Management Team to deal with any critical incidents that may arise. The team is comprised of Mrs Walker (Principal and Team Leader), Mrs Deacon (Designated Teacher for Child Protection), Mrs Kathleen Rodgers (Building Supervisor) and Mrs K Doherty (Chairperson).

The Critical Incident Management Team will plan for and manage any critical incidents in school. The team will use the "Critical Incident Management Strategy Planning Tool" and "Critical Incident Management Guide" to assist them devise a plan to manage critical incidents and review the plan's effectiveness.

When dealing with any critical incident a number of key tasks will need to be addressed. These tasks will vary in type and priority order according to the incident and circumstances. These key tasks will include:

- A school response depending on the nature of the incident;
- Essential tasks, contingency arrangements and staff deployment;
- Clear lines of communication;
- A contact list of external agencies e.g. EA;
- Support for pupils and staff;
- Procedures for dealing with the media;
- Plans for ongoing support;
- Consideration of memorials or commemorations;

### **Communication**

The central point of contact within the school for all aspects of the critical incident plan is the Principal.

The school's telephone land lines will be used to make and receive calls but the Principal's mobile line will be kept clear to receive important official messages. The school's landlines will be operated by members of the critical incident team who will communicate an agreed statement to all callers. They will also speak to any parents who come in person to the school.

A "cascade" telephone plan has been prepared to communicate details of a critical incident to staff, governors and parents as necessary. See Appendix 1 for details. Furthermore, a "List of Useful Contacts" will also be maintained to facilitate communications with essential staff, services and interested parties.

A prepared statement will be issued to the press and the Principal and Chair of the Governors will deal with all direct communications from the press. Other members of the school community contacted by the press will direct the communication to the Principal and Chair of Governors. Staff and governors will not communicate details of the critical incident via social media except the communication is as agreed by the Principal and Chair of Governors.

A log of all incoming and outgoing calls in relation to the critical incident will be maintained.

### **Support for Pupils and Staff**

The Critical Incidence Response Team for the EA and or the Independent Counselling Service for Schools will provide initial support to the school community if necessary. See the

"Contacts List" for all details. As it may be necessary to respond to a critical incident over weekend or holiday periods a copy of this list will be kept at home by all members of the Critical Incident Management Team.

### **During the Incident**

#### **Implementation of the Critical Incident Plan**

As all incidents are different the Principal will, as soon as she becomes aware of an incident that might impact on the school find out the facts and assess the significance for the school. She will then decide the response that should be implemented. This decision can be reviewed if new information emerges.

When a critical incident occurs the school will inform key contacts of the incident and keep them updated. This may include:

- The emergency services;
- The Board of Governors;
- EA's Critical Incident Response Team;
- Any other relevant agency that may have a role in providing support.

The school will then undertake the key tasks that are necessary. These may include:

- Responding to any immediate risk e.g. first aid or evacuation;
- Contacting the emergency services/other relevant authorities and agreed parties;
- Mobilising the Critical Incident Management Team;
- Agreeing the school routine for that day;
- Informing staff;
- Setting up designated rooms;
- Informing pupils and parents;
- Preparing a media statement;
- Assessing the initial impact of the critical incident on pupils and staff;
- Restoration of the normal school routine as soon as possible.

#### **Briefing Staff**

A formal staff briefing should take place as soon as possible after the circumstances of the incident are known. A debriefing should take place at the end of the school day. Absent staff should also be informed. The initial staff briefing should include:

- A brief factual account of what has happened;
- An outline of the school's response and proposed plan of action;
- An outline of staff responsibility for monitoring pupil and staff welfare;
- The clarification of specific responsibilities for staff;
- Procedures for dealing with media enquiries;

- Procedures for informing pupils and parents;
- Time for the staff to ask questions and respond;
- Time to identify vulnerable pupils and staff who may be at risk;
- Informing staff of the support services that are available;
- Time and place of next briefing/debriefing session.

School staff may also need support during a critical incident in order for them to deal with their personal distress and help pupils at the same time. As part of the overall strategy to deal with a critical incident all staff will be given the opportunity to discuss their own reactions and share their concerns about vulnerable pupils. Further to this it may be necessary for staff to receive help from the EA, the Governors and relevant members of the clergy. If such help is needed it will be arranged by the school's Critical Incident Team or the EA.

### **Briefing Pupils**

Pupils should be briefed as soon as possible to prevent the spread of rumours. This will be done in a manner sensitive to their cognitive and developmental stage and the nature of the incident. Particular care will be taken with very young children and those with special educational needs to inform them in ways appropriate to their degree of maturity. Pupils will be told in class groups by the teacher. Staff will agree together what they tell the children. A carefully worded statement may be read. Staff will consult Appendix 6,7,8 &9 of DE's "A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools" when preparing their communications to pupils.

Teachers will pass on factual information and allow time for children to ask questions and provide them with time to discuss their feelings. Staff will also monitor pupils while in class, corridors and school grounds to ensure they are supported. Appendix 10, 11 and 12 of DE's "A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools" will be used to inform staff as they support children.

Individual pupils will be enabled to speak to a member of the school's pastoral care staff if this proves necessary. The EA's Critical Incident Support Team, the Independent Counselling Service for Schools or a school nurse may also be asked to help. In some circumstances some pupils may need to be sent home. Arrangements will be made directly with parents to ensure that the pupils are supported at home. Pupils absent from school should also be informed by the class teacher.

### **Vulnerable Pupils**

Special care needs to be taken with vulnerable pupils. Vulnerable pupils include:

- Close friends and relatives of those affected;
- Pupils with a history of self-harm or suicidal ideation;
- Pupils who have experienced recent bereavement or separation;

- Pupils with mental health difficulties;
- Pupils with child protection needs;
- Pupils with learning, communication or sensory difficulties;
- Non-communicative pupils who have difficulty talking about their feelings;
- Pupils experiencing serious family difficulties.

### **Briefing Parents**

Parents will always be informed when a critical incident occurs. Parents of pupils directly involved will be telephoned or visited. Other parents will normally be told by letter. Advice on how parents can support their children may also be issued. If parents need to be contacted as a matter of urgency "CallParents" may be used. Appendix 13 & 14 of DE's "A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools" will be used to advise staff on information for parents.

### **Briefing the Media**

In order to promote accurate reporting by the media a press statement will be prepared by the Critical Incident Management Team. Before releasing it the normal procedure will be to:

- Check details with the police, ambulance and fire and rescue services;
- Contact the EA's Communication Officer for advice;
- Prepare an accurate, factual report as a background to any questions;
- Ensure all staff and governors know that all media enquiries and follow up enquiries will be handled by the Principal and Chair of Governors;
- Ensure all other staff know that they are not to make comments about the incident including on social media;
- News media will not be permitted on school property without the prior approval of the Principal.
- Consider the advice proffered in Appendix 15 & 16 of DE's "A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools" when preparing press statements and media interviews.

### **Assisting Statutory Investigations**

Depending on the nature of the critical incident the school may be involved in an investigation which could encompass a number of statutory agencies e.g. the sudden death of a pupil. This includes the prospect of a coroner's inquest and officially established reviews enquiring into the pupil's death and the circumstances surrounding it.

## **After the Incident**

### **Support for Pupils**

Pupils returning to school after a critical incident may need support so suitable arrangements may need to be put in place such as:

- Arranging a home visit to discuss plans for returning to school;

- Helping arrange a rota of support from school friends;
- Arranging for school work to be sent home if appropriate;
- Briefing staff and pupils on how best to support pupils returning to school;
- Planning support for emotional needs;
- Arranging support for mobility difficulties or disfigurement;
- A support plan for those returning to school after a long absence or those considered at risk;
- A record kept of any pupil affected by bereavement and their receiving school informed;
- Consideration of specialist intervention for pupils who continues to show signs of distress after a number of weeks;
- Bereaved families supported in a sensitive fashion including at memorials and anniversaries;
- Consider the advice offered in Appendix 17, 18 & 19 of DE's "A Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools."

### **Support for Staff**

The Critical Incident Management Team will be alert to the possibility of staff being under significant strain and direct them to sources of support.

### **Review of Critical Incident Management Plan**

A review will be carried out within six weeks of a critical incident. It will be done in collaboration with the support agencies involved and in consultation with the school community. The review will address the following questions:

- What went well?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Were there any gaps?
- Have all necessary referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?
- Have all records relevant to the critical incident been secured?
- Are there any identified training needs?
- Does the plan need to be updated/changed?

The Critical Incident Management Plan will be formally reviewed annually. Key contact details will be updated regularly.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Chair of Board of Governors)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Principal)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_