

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

PURPOSE:

Events that cause severe emotional distress may occur at any time and without warning. These events (variously called Critical Incidents, Traumatic Incidents, Disasters, Emergencies or Crises) often denote disaster or crisis situations which affect many people and which can give rise to a range of stress or trauma responses. They can also refer to events of a much smaller scale.

In most cases emotional and psychological reactions to critical incidents are normal human reactions to abnormal circumstances and, with appropriate support, most people can deal with these and soon return to normal functioning. For some, specialist professional support may be advisable when symptoms are extreme or persistent and are causing an individual ongoing trauma or difficulty.

Healthy coping responses are likely to be facilitated when an organisation acknowledges the effects of traumatic effects on individuals and creates opportunities for individuals to appropriately address their needs for recovery and healing.

DEFINITION:

For the purpose of this policy a critical incident is defined as any event which has a stressful impact sufficient enough to overwhelm the usually effective coping skills of either an individual or a group. Critical incidents are typically sudden, powerful events which are outside the range of ordinary human experiences. Since they are so sudden and unusual, they can have a strong emotional effect even on well-trained, experienced people. Critical incidents can range from small scale localised incidents lasting minutes and affecting a single school or section of a school through to large scale events requiring state level coordination and assistance from external agencies. Critical incidents can also be events which, by their nature, have the potential to leave lasting effects on those involved.

Some Critical Incidents that may affect a school community include:

- a death in the school community - following illness, by accident, by suicide or the result of criminal behaviour
- serious injury to a member of the school community
- students or staff lost or injured on an excursion/camp
- violent assault on a member of the school community
- witnessing a serious accident or an act of violence
- significant damage to, or destruction of, part or whole of the school property, due to vandalism, accident, or fire, flooding or some other extreme of nature
- bomb threat, explosion, gas or chemical hazard
- use of violent weapons in the school
- outsiders coming into school and being aggressive towards students and/or staff
- disappearance of a student or staff member
- media coverage of issues in a way which is distressing to the school community
- drug related incident

Such incidents often involve:

- rapid time sequences
- overwhelming of usual coping responses of individuals and communities
- severe disruption, at least temporarily, to the functioning of individuals or communities
- perceptions of threat and helplessness, and a turning to others for help

Guidelines:

It is the nature of many critical incidents that they come upon us without warning and require immediate thoughtful response. This response will be guided by the Critical Incident Management Policy and comprises four components:

- Preparedness
The continued adherence to the Harrisfield Displan, and the planning and rehearsal of processes to be undertaken when an emergency occurs.
- Prevention
The prevention and mitigation of emergencies, including trauma. The identification of risks that are specific to the Harrisfield environment.
- Response
The implementation of planned procedures to ensure the ongoing safety of the school community including liaison with emergency services, mobilising action plans, assigning roles and responsibilities.
- Recovery
The implementation of recovery processes to facilitate the return to routine including debriefing, the formation of a Critical Incident Response Team to coordinate recovery, monitoring reactions. Harrisfield will also follow the general procedures of response and recovery set by DET. Refer to DET Guidelines 6.15 Emergency and Critical Incident Management and 7.28 Security Management.

IMPLEMENTATION:**Prevention**

- Occupational Health & Safety Officer appointed.
- Policies developed for the areas of Student Welfare, Prevention of Harassment, First Aid Officer and Anaphylaxis
- File created on Staff drive to report repairs & problems with school equipment that is followed up regularly by the OH&S officer
- Procedures known to all staff regarding the late arrival or early release of students
- Procedures known to all staff regarding visitors to the school including easily identifiable badges

Preparedness

- Refer to the Harrisfield Primary School Displan document

Response

- The Principal should be notified immediately after a Critical Incident has occurred. The Principal (or their designated representative) will then confirm the incident and collect information about the incident from a reliable source as a matter of urgency.

The formation of a Critical Incident Core Team will comprise of the Principal, Assistant Principal, Student Wellbeing coordinator, DET representative eg Guidance Officer, Emergency Management Support Person

- The initial concern will be for the immediate physical safety and well-being of staff and students. As the immediate crisis passes, recovery activities will follow. Short term tasks will include setting up a recovery room, informing staff, informing the students.
- The Core Team will be the decision making group who will follow the general procedures of response and recovery set by DET. This also includes the delivery of public statements to the wider school community or the media (*Refer to Managing School Emergencies, Minimising the impact of Trauma on staff and Students.*)

Recovery

- Debriefing and counselling are important elements of the recovery that need to be offered to all groups of people affected by a traumatic incident.
- Groups affected by trauma may include those who suffer directly from the incident, parents, relatives or friends, helpers or recovery personnel or school community members.
- It is especially important for members of the Critical Incident Core Team and the Implementation Team who are required to make swift and often difficult decisions during or immediately following a critical incident to be provided with support.
- Support for debriefing & counselling can be provided by DET and the local council.
- Long term recovery management requires a continuing awareness of individuals' needs and reactions and a process for managing those responses. The first six month period following a critical incident has been identified as especially critical. Research has shown that recovery can or may take up to three years or longer.

Evaluation:

Successful evaluation and assessment indicators will include:

- Emergency drills being conducted on a regular basis
- OH&S surveys to be conducted as required
- Regular inspection of the grounds and facilities conducted by the Principal and OH&S Officer
- Review of Critical Incident Management Policy as part of the long term recovery procedures following a Critical incident. Changes/modifications may need to be made as a direct result of the experiences gained from an event.
- The provision of professional development for staff as deemed necessary

Reviewed: September 17, 2018

Next scheduled review: August 2020