

Barnsley Educational Child and Community Psychology Service

Support for schools in the event of a critical incident



Overview

This document has been developed as a reference to help schools to:

- plan ahead for contingencies
- clarify responsibilities and actions in the event of a critical incident
- ensure prompt action at the time of and following a critical incident
- ensure that there is longer term monitoring in place
- provide a focus for further planning and training for your school

Critical incidents

While very few schools will experience a major crisis, most schools at some time or other experience traumatic situations. The key to managing a critical incident is planning. Schools that have developed a Critical Incident Management Plan report being able to cope more effectively in the aftermath of an incident. Having a plan enables staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. It may also ensure that normality returns as soon as possible and that the impact on students and staff are limited.

Defining a critical incident

A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events, which causes trauma within a school community, and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of that school.

Whilst it is impossible to identify every possible critical incident which might affect students and staff in a school, there are some events which are more likely than others.

There are 4 main categories of incidents, those occurring:

- at a school
- in the general proximity of the school
- whilst on an educational visit i.e. out of school
- outside the school's jurisdiction

It is important for the school to identify potential critical incidents and which procedures to follow in each instance. Some crises affecting schools are listed below:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, murder, accident, terminal illness or suicide
- An accident or major incident involving pupils or staff on or off the school premises
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or intrusion into the school
- A hostage taking or kidnap attempt at school
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community

- The need for immediate evacuation of the school with no likelihood of return for some hours/days (e.g. industrial accident or a major RTA)
- Pupil/staff member with serious contagious illness
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Civil disturbance in the local community

There are of course many other possibilities and you may wish to consider any specific hazards that are present in your school or surrounding area.

Creating a Critical Incident Management Plan

The Critical Incident Management Plan must balance the twin objectives of managing the incident and meeting the needs of the whole school community. The plan should identify the key tasks that need to be dealt with at various stages of a critical incident. These key tasks should include:

- A school response
- Essential tasks contingency arrangements and staff deployment
- Clear lines of communication
- Resource contact list of external agencies
- Contact numbers for staff pupils parents/carers
- Support for staff and pupils
- Procedures for dealing with media
- Plans for on going support
- Consideration of memorials or commemorations

Creation of a Critical Incident Management Team

A planning team of key personnel should be formed. The personnel selected should be suitable in terms of their personal and practical skills. This team should meet annually to update and review the plan. In the case of small schools, the team may consist of staff members from a number of different schools in the area. By identifying the key tasks that arise in the aftermath of an incident, the school can decide on the roles and who will be responsible for different tasks. Generally the Head teacher will play a key role, being responsible for many of the tasks. Certain administrative tasks need to be carried out on an ongoing basis so that communication is speedy and effective in the event of a critical incident.

Development and communication of a Critical Incident Management Plan

In devising the plan, all staff should be consulted and made aware of the school's critical incident policies and procedures. A plan for evacuation should be included where do staff/pupils go? What should they take with them?

Once prepared, the Critical Incident Management Plan should be instantly accessible to the personnel who will have the key role in putting the plan into action. All new and temporary staff should also be informed. A copy of the plan of the school building should be displayed in key places, with exits highlighted this is already required under Health and Safety regulations.

Key administrative tasks in the Critical Incident Management process are:

Maintaining an up-to-date list of contact numbers

Numbers should be available for:

- pupils, parents/carers, guardians
- staff
- emergency support services (See Emergency Contact List)

Agreement should be reached about where lists will be kept and responsibility for regular updating should be clearly assigned.

Identifying roles to be fulfilled at the time of a critical incident

External liaison with:

- Outside support agencies i.e. Emergency Service, LA, NHS, Educational Psychology Service
- Parents/Carers
- Distressed visitors
- The media

Internal care and communication with:

- staff
- students in general
- students more immediately involved or affected

Maintaining administration and services such as:

- telephone (eg. keeping a line free for outgoing and important incoming calls)
- Rooms for debriefing, parents/carers, quiet room, counselling etc.
- log of events, letters to parents/carers, telephone calls made and received
- dealing with normal school business

It is advisable to maintain the normal routine as far as possible for classes not immediately affected by the incident.

Procedures to be followed in the event of a critical incident

As far as possible it is important to try to maintain normal routines

Checklist for action to be taken

A checklist is provided at the end of this section. The procedures to be followed will depend on the particular incident that has occurred and the particular arrangements in place in a school.

Immediate action (first 24 hours)

Action	Comment
Ensure the school population is safe either on the school premises or elsewhere	
Phone the appropriate agencies: Emergency Services LA NHS	Dial 999. At a later stage in the incident you will be given other contact numbers
Keep a log of actions taken	Keep a record of names of officers from the Emergency Services and any other external agencies which you contact Note any actions you take or any help you request This will not only serve to help you at the time but may be needed in any subsequent inquiry
Obtain as much accurate factual information as possible	What happened when and where Extent of injuries Location of those injured and not injured How many involved and names and ages Risk of further injury Damage to buildings Agencies already contacted
Gather and brief all members of the Senior Management Team/Critical Incidents Management Team	Agree statement of facts for staff students parents/carers and media and if possible complete a written version of it Allocate responsibilities and roles according to the school's own action plan Arrange regular group meetings Inform Chair of Governors and other Governors Appoint someone to handle phone enquiries and respond to media
Organise a staff meeting Organise supervision of pupils during staff meetings	Give an account of the facts Opportunity for staff to express views and feelings. Discussion of how staff will share facts with students Outline routine for the day Inform staff of agencies involved and supports in place Procedure for identifying vulnerable students Distribution of relevant handout material Decide whether any outside agencies need to be invited
Review pupil/staff timetables for the day	Make arrangements for breaks, lunch, & home time

Designate an Incident Management Room.	It should be located away from any hazard, offer privacy and be available for as long as required
Ensure you have sufficient telephones available	At least one telephone line should be available for outgoing calls only Make sure telephone numbers are shared between all members of the Critical Incident Management Group
Keep a telephone log of all incoming and outgoing calls.	This will help identify the people who have been and still need to be spoken to Consider having a rota of people collating this information Calls may be stressful, and people may need time away from the telephones
Inform parents/carers of children directly involved	Agree who should share information with parents/carers and how this should be done. List who has been contacted to avoid duplication Give relevant and factual information Set room aside for distressed students to meet with parents/carers Provide support to parents/carers who are on their own when they arrive at school Give telephone numbers for enquiries
Inform parents/carers of children not directly involved	Parents/carers of children in the school should be informed of the incident and that their child may be upset Prepare letter to parents/carers stating facts and brief outline of incident
Make contact with bereaved family	
Dealing with media	Consult with LA media support personnel Prepare written statements to include facts about the incident, what has been done already, what is going to be done and positive information or comments about the deceased person Keep responses simple factual and brief Brief staff and students and advise them on dealing with media
Inform students	Consider age of children, group size and who should deliver message Support best given by adults known to the child Give facts Avoid speculation Allow pupils to ask questions, tell their story and express feelings Help students realise overwhelming emotions are natural
Organise the reunion of students with their	Inform students Facilitate distressed students and parents/carers by providing

parents/carers if necessary	private room where they can meet following an incident Where appropriate offer help with transport
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Medium term actions (24-72 hours)

Action	Comment
Review events of first 24 hours	Reconvene key staff/ Critical Incident Management Team Check out how team is coping Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/ carers/ students/ staff Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable pupils
Arrange briefings for all staff ASAP	Be sure to include all staff: ancillary staff such as SMSAs, NTAs, and cleaning and caretaking staff, volunteers Include those with a responsibility within the local authority Establish contact with absent staff and pupils Be sensitive as to how staff are coping on a personal and professional level Update media as necessary
Arrange support for individual students groups of students and parents/carers if necessary	Provide suitable room Support and/or information meeting for parents/cares/students to clarify facts and offer advice and reassurance Inform about support services and provide relevant handouts Arrange, in consultation with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings as needed with parental permission
Continue to keep pupils fully briefed and updated.	This discourages speculation; if at that time you have no additional information, please tell everyone that this is the case
Liaise with family regarding funeral arrangements and memorial service	Designate staff to liaise with the family to extend sympathies clarify families wishes regarding schools involvement in funeral/memorial service Arrange home visit within 24 hours by two staff if appropriate Have regard for religious traditions and beliefs Decide in accordance with parents/carers wishes attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service
Plan visits to injured persons	Name key person
Try to stick as closely as possible to normal school routines	It is important that the school return to normality as soon as possible, however, there will be need for special staff meetings and discussions in classes and assemblies
School Closure	Request a decision on this from school management team
Be prepared to deal with insurance claims/legal	You may need a number of designated staff members to prepare an inventory of what has been lost or damaged; ensure

matters	that a central log of this is kept in the incident room Back up electronically if possible
Keep the press informed and work together with the BMBC Communications and Marketing team as much as possible	You may wish to provide a room for press related work Contact Communications on 01226 773443 or communications@barnsley.gov.uk
Develop and start to implement your recovery plan	A recovery plan is very useful to add the return to normality Plan ahead for various contingencies, for example by running through a 'virtual incident' Remember that some incidents will reverberate for years rather than months

Longer term actions

Action	Comment
The Senior Management Team and/or Critical Incident Team should review how the incident was handled and amend the Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately	This might be carried out both as an internal exercise and in consultation with external organisations What went well, where were the gaps, have all necessary support services been accessed? Any unfinished business? Formalise Critical Incident Pan for the future
Monitor students for signs of distress	Look for uncharacteristic behaviours, deterioration in academic performance, physical changes inappropriate emotional reactions or absenteeism
New staff	Ensure new staff are aware of incident and pupils affected Consider transition for pupils affected by the incident and passing on information to key people Ensure staff are aware of critical incident policy
Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries and special dates	Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and additional support may be needed Acknowledge the anniversary with family and liaise on any proposed commemoration Be sensitive to significant dates like birthdays, Christmas, Mother's day, Father's day

SUMMARY CHECKLIST FOR HEADTEACHERS

- Gather the facts Who? What? When? Where?
- Contact appropriate agencies
- Convene the Critical Incident Management Team
- Organise for the supervision of students
- Inform staff
- Agree on a statement of the facts
- Identify high risk students
- Appoint someone to deal with phone enquiries
- Organise timetable for the day

MAINTAIN THE NORMAL SCHOOL ROUTINE WHEN AT ALL POSSIBLE

- Inform Parents/Carer
- Inform students
- Make contact with the bereaved family
- Organise support
- Respond to the media

Acknowledgements

Sheffield Educational Psychology Service. Responding to Critical Incidents . Advice and Information pack for schools.

iMatter promoting emotional health and wellbeing. A Guide to managing critical Incidents in school Department of Education www.deni.gov.uk