



Victoria Primary School

Critical Incidents **Strategy**

2019

Vision Statement

*An inclusive, imaginative and inspiring Learning Community
where everyone can be safe, healthy, happy and successful together.*

V.P.S. Critical Incident Strategy

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

AIMS

- To recognise which incidents may be critical for the school community
- To respond to a critical incident in an informed manner
- To create a positive, open, communicative climate where the needs of staff and pupils are met in critical incident situations.
- To create a safe school environment whereby the physical, social and psychological needs of the pupils and staff is prioritised.
- To outline, monitor and review the management plans for dealing with different emergencies.
- To promote active coping skills within the curriculum.
- To establish positive working relationships and dialogue with outside agencies, thus enabling full and effective collaboration in the event of a critical incident.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The CRITICAL MANAGEMENT TEAM will consist of:

Principal
 Senior teacher
 Caretaker
 Office Manager
 Child Protection officer
 Chairman of Board of Governors

The Principal will take the role of Team Leader to co-ordinate the school's response, oversee implementation of this plan and record the actions taken.

Office Manager	Principal	Senior Teacher	Caretaker	DT / DDT	Chair of Governors
Central Information point	Instigates proceedings	Staff well being	Ensure grounds are safe	Pupil well being	Support Principal
Dedicated phone line	Staff briefing and debriefing – set regular times	Instigate proceedings in the absence of the Principal			
Contact emergency services	Liaise with EA (SOUTH EASTERN)	Inform all pupils			
Deal with media	Make contact with parents				
	Record in C.I. Management booklet				
	Concludes proceedings				

PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

No-one from school should speak to the media and the media are not allowed onto school premises in these circumstances. They should be referred to the EA (SOUTH EASTERN) with the following statement:

“We would appreciate if you would give us time to support our young children and deal with the issues arising. Please contact the EA (SOUTH EASTERN) for a prepared statement.”

Any Press requests that come in should not be responded to. Instead they should be asked to put their query in an e-mail. Reporters should be told that we are working on the situation with the Board of Governors and the EA (SOUTH EASTERN) and that someone will get back to them.

Procedures for safeguarding must be adhered to. All information must go to the Chief Executive before going to the Press.

ALL STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS MUST BE AUTHORISED BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE.

Parents should also be asked to refrain from talking to the Press while the school manages the situation.

DAY ONE

- Assess the risk and contact the emergency services if appropriate
- Mobilise the school's C.I. Team and initiate the C.I. plan
- Consider need for school closure
- Agree a school routine for the day
- Maintain structures and routines where possible
- Inform key people, seek support as appropriate, link with other relevant agencies
- Establish a central information point – collate accurate information
- Set up a recovery room if required
- Brief all staff
- Agree information to be relayed to pupils and do so sensitively (Handouts 2 & 3)
- Agree information to be relayed to parents and do so sensitively
- Responding to the media (Handout 4)
- Liaise with police investigation if appropriate
- Assess initial impact of C.I. on staff and pupils being mindful of vulnerable individuals and appropriate support
- Monitor and record school's response in C.I. Management booklet
- Meeting of C.I. team at the end of day 1
- Debrief staff at the end of day 1

DAY TWO

- Record any further information / details that have come to light since day 1
- Maintain the central information point
- Maintain recovery / quiet room
- Deal with cover / flexible timetable etc.
- Brief all staff
- Attend to needs of pupils and parents
- Preparation for any funeral / memorial services
- Meeting of C.I. team at the end of Day 2
- Debrief staff at the end of Day 2

AFTER THE INCIDENT

The aim is to help the school's immediate and broader community. This requires careful and sensitive planning, timing and implementation.

- Re-establishment of feeling of safety and predictability among the school community
- Be aware that effects and behaviours could persist for a long time
- Be aware that young people revisit as they develop and mature
- Be aware of secondary trauma
- Expect a range of emotions
- Do not expect to please everyone
- Ongoing monitoring of pupils' emotional well-being
- Support for pupils with ongoing difficulties
- Support for bereaved families
- Ongoing support for staff
- Ensure support is available for Principal and C.I. Team
- Memorials, anniversaries and other significant times
- Review critical incident plan

Carecall Services: 0808 800 0002

LINKS WITH OTHER SCHOOL POLICIES

Child Protection

Pastoral Care

Internet / mobile use

Health and Safety

Special Needs

CURRICULAR LINKS

PDMU

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF STRATEGY

This strategy will be reviewed regularly and after any incident has occurred.

Signed: *S. Weir*
Principal

Date: March 2020

Signed: *S.A. McFerran*
Chair of Board of Governors

Date: March 2020

BREAKING THE NEWS TO PUPILS – A SUMMARY GUIDE FOR STAFF

1. Relay the information agreed at the staff briefing. Aim to deliver the information to all pupils at approximately the same time. Be mindful of pupils absent from school and vulnerable pupils.
2. Remember: a family's right to privacy: appropriate language and factual information only; information derived calmly and sensitively; small group setting; give clear, concise, bite size explanations.
3. Be patient – you may have to repeat the information many times. Be honest, specific and straightforward – it is acceptable to say you do not have all the answers. Be available for the pupil. Monitor initial reactions.
4. Allow time for pupils to discuss their feelings. Provide reassurance and information about school support available. Inform pupils regarding designated area should they be unable to remain in class. Monitor ongoing and developing reactions. Refer on if in doubt.
5. Share your own feelings, if appropriate; acknowledge the pupil's feelings; if necessary, use pictures and social stories to aid understanding. Communicate clearly that all staff care about those directly affected, model appropriate concern.
6. Be prepared that a pupil may come back and ask more questions. Maintain a calm, listening and supportive role.
7. If you can, be pro-active – have information ready for possible questions. Assure pupils that they will be kept updated.
8. Issue and discuss any information sheets for pupils.

NOTE: BE SENSITIVE TO PARENTAL WISHES REGARDING INFORMATION

SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Announcements of a tragedy should be simple, straightforward and sincere. These examples provide a suggested structure and are not intended to be scripts to be adhered to rigidly. Staff who know those involved in a critical incident can add the personal touch that is so important at such a time.

After the actual announcement, pupils should be assured that they will have the opportunity to talk about the critical incident.

Examples

After a known fatality...

We are taking this time to think about _____, who died last night in a road traffic accident. _____ was travelling with her family to _____ when the accident occurred. We do not know any further details about the accident at his time except that the rest of the family is safe. The funeral is being held at _____ on _____. A funeral is a special time to remember a person who has died. The school will let your families know about the funeral arrangements in a letter which will be sent home tomorrow.

Let's take a moment of silence to think of _____, to remember all the fond things about her and to say goodbye. In our silence we will express our loving thoughts.

After a suspected suicide...

Sadly, a tragedy has happened in our school community. _____ has died suddenly. We want to respect the family's need for privacy at this time but you will be given information about funeral arrangements as soon as possible.

This kind of tragic news is hard to accept. You may experience many feelings within the next few days. Everyone deals with loss differently and it is important to respect the way others grieve. We want to listen to your feelings and concerns so support staff are available in _____. Feel free to arrange to go there and talk to someone.

PRESS STATEMENTS AND MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Press Statements

Schools are under no obligation to speak to the press.

Schools may wish to work with EA (SOUTH EASTERN) to prepare a press statement. These should explain that the whole school has been deeply shocked and that all available resources and support services have been gathered. Outline what steps are being taken to provide support for pupils and staff in an effort to get things back to normal as soon as possible.

Statements should include:

1. Facts about the incident. What has been done and what is planned.
2. Information regarding the implementation of the school's critical incident management plan and the fact that the situation is under control.
3. Affirmation of the principles of the critical incident management in order to:
 - Reduce and prevent further stress
 - Stabilise the situation
 - Normalise and promote the functioning of the school, its staff and pupils
 - Ensure everyone receives the help they need.

Media Interviews

It is not the school's role to discuss critical incidents with the media.
The school identifies the EA (SOUTH EASTERN) as the media spokesperson.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASES

School grieves sudden death of a pupil

As reported by the PSNI, _____ (use caution if naming a pupil), a pupil at our school died tragically on _____. The circumstances of the death are not known at this time and an investigation is currently ongoing. This is a tragic loss to _____'s family and to our school community. To assist in supporting our staff and pupils through this time of grief, additional trained staff from the Education and Library Board's Critical Incident Response Team has been assigned to the school to provide support. A letter has been sent by the school to parents, informing them of this incident and providing information on the support services available through the school.

A special assembly to remember _____ has been arranged for _____.

Historic school destroyed by fire

_____ School was destroyed by fire in the early hours of Saturday morning. Fire and rescue services and the PSNI responded to a 999 call reporting the blaze at 3am on Sunday. There were no injuries reported. The cause of the fire is under investigation. Damage is estimated at £_____million.

“It is a tragedy to have lost this school, not only for our students and their families, but for our community.” _____, Chairperson of the Board of Governors said. “Schools are much more than a place of learning. They are where our communities meet for special events, to vote and to play. ___ school in particular, was a landmark in our community with historical building designation.” The school was built in 1906 and has undergone substantial renovations over recent years.

Arrangements have been made to house the school’s pupils at _____ for the remainder of this school term, with the addition of temporary classrooms at _____. All parents were contacted by telephone on Sunday.

To assist in supporting our staff and pupils through this time of shock and loss, additional trained staff from the Education and Library Board’s Critical Incident Response Team have been assigned to the school to provide support.

SUPPORTING PUPILS WHO MAY BE SUICIDAL

If a member of staff becomes aware of child's distress he/she has 2 major responsibilities:

1. To respond with empathy and in a non-judgemental way to the child in need;
2. To follow the usual safeguarding procedures to make appropriate referrals to ensure the child's safety, because self-harm and expressions of suicidal thoughts are safeguarding issues.

Responding to a distressed young person

- **Listen.** It can be very difficult for a young person to disclose distress so it is essential that they are given time and attention. Privacy is also important.
- **Take it seriously.** Disclosures of distress should never be minimised. The young person should be taken seriously but the adult should not express alarm. The young person needs to feel safe and have confidence in adults.
- **Accept the possibility of suicidal thoughts.** These feelings are real and should not be dismissed.
- **Don't promise confidentiality.** Ensure that the young person knows that the information will be handled sensitively but that it must be shared with others to safeguard them.
- **Show a caring attitude.** It is acceptable to express care for the young person and a commitment to their well-being.
- **Be open.** If a suicidal intent is suspected, it is appropriate to ask the young person whether they are thinking of harming themselves and have any plans.
- **Supervise closely.** Keep the pupil with you until you can deliver them to the care of the Designated Teacher for Child Protection. Sometimes it is more helpful for the teacher whom the pupil expressed their distress to be the one who stays with him or her while the designated teacher makes safeguarding arrangements.

Making suitable safeguarding provision.

The designated teacher for Child Protection should ensure that pupil is safeguarded by doing the following:

- **Continue to supervise closely.** The pupil should not be left unsupervised at this stage
- **Contact parents.** Parents should be advised of the content of the disclosure, the school's concern and asked to take the child or young person to the doctor for an 'emergency mental state assessment' and potential referral to a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.
- **Safely hand over the young person into the care of parents.** Parents should be advised to supervise very closely.
- **If the above is not possible.** ... If the school cannot safely deliver the child into the care of parents, or have concerns that appropriate support will not be sought, it is possible for school staff to bring a child directly to A&E acting *in loco parentis*
- **Follow-up.** The designated teacher should remain in sensitive contact with parents and plan to support the young person upon return to school. In planning to support the young person the school may wish to seek medical / psychiatric advice in this regard.

It is important that teachers who are involved in this type of pupil care are fully supported within their own line management structure within the school.

Available support:

- Independent counselling Service for Schools
- Lifeline
This is a regional telephone counselling service available to all ages, offering immediate help over the phone 24/7. Lifeline also provides follow-on counselling services to young people.

LIFELINE – 0808 808 8000

RESPONDING TO PUPIL QUESTIONS FOLLOWING A SUDDEN DEATH

It can be very difficult to respond to questions from children following a sudden death especially when the member of staff is also shocked and bereaved.

It is sometimes useful to agree a 'script' for all staff members to use when responding. The advantages of this are:

- The staff have a form of words to use so are not caught unawares
- The children get to hear a reassuring message over and over again. They need this because when they are bereaved they can't process information they receive.

It is best to agree a 'script' with staff who know the children well, some suggestions are included below.

Questions:

1. Why did they die?

There are some things we understand and some things we don't. We don't know why they died. The doctor has told us the reason was _____.

2. Will I / others die?

Usually people die when they have lived their life and grow old and then become sick. It is very unusual for young people to die. You are very healthy and will probably live for a very long time.

3. What happens when you die?

Sometimes children become very interested in physical details. Keep the reply very simple and factual. Repeat it as often as necessary and don't be drawn into giving further details.

4. Questions about adults dying.

Some questions reveal that children feel insecure about whether the adults in their lives will be around to look after them. Reassure them that even though nobody knows the future, they can be sure there will always be reliable adults to look after them.

NB. Be careful never to use euphemisms for death. Keep it simple, factual and clear. Younger children find it difficult to understand the permanence of death. Euphemisms will only make it worse.

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear parent

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you of the sudden death of _____
(use caution if naming a pupil) a pupil in class _____. The pupils were told this morning
by _____.

_____ died of (an asthma attack, meningitis etc.) and the pupils
have been reassured this is something that does not happen very often. Your child
may not want to talk about it but it is likely that they will need extra love and support
from you in the days ahead. This does not mean that anything is wrong with him/
her. It only means that this traumatic event has been too powerful for them to deal
with on their own. They may be feeling anxious. Take time to listen to your child and
try to provide a predictable routine at home. Avoid too many absences to start with.

We have enclosed an information booklet which may be useful to you at this time.

Trained staff from the Education and Library Board's Critical Incident Response
Team are helping to support us through this difficult time. It is sometimes necessary
for a member of the team to speak to a class or to individual pupils who may be
distress. He /She will be guided by the Principal in this. If you do not wish your child
to receive such support from the team, please contact us immediately.

We are deeply saddened by this great loss but are trying, for the pupil's sake, to
keep the school environment as normal as possible. Our thoughts are with
_____ 's family at this tragic time and the school community sends them
sincerest sympathy and support.

The funeral is on _____ at _____. We are in touch with the family regarding
their wishes for the school's representation at the Service.

If you require further clarification or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to
contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

PRINCIPAL