



## Our Lady of the Way Catholic Primary School **Critical Incident Policy & Response Plan**

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

Our Lady of the Way Primary School 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 should 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.

### **ACTION TO BE TAKEN AS A RESULT OF A TRAGIC/TRAUMATIC EVENT WHICH INVOLVES THE SCHOOL**

#### **INFORMATION GATHERING**

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Inform Principal

- Confirm incident / collect reliable information
- Contact Emergency Services (see attached list)

#### **PLAN**

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Principal convenes a meeting of Leadership Team and relevant staff to:

**Appoint**

- Appoint the Management Plan Co-ordinator
- Outline proposed Action Plan – as below
- Assign tasks (as below) to appropriate personnel
- Appoint Press/Media Liaison Person (Must be done through Principal's Office)
- Appoint Co-ordinator of Counselling/Support
- Appoint contact person for parents (where necessary)

## Inform / Consult

- Staff: Briefing and Management Plan
- Students who need to know – assembly or specified group meetings
- Parents who need to know: Phone or Letter
- Legal Representation
- V.I.E.U.
- Relevant outside agencies

## Allocate Resources

- Control use of phones – allocate specific lines for incoming and outgoing calls
- Arrange security
- Designate
  - Assembly point of parents
  - Media Room
  - Recovery room for staff and / or students

## INTERVENE

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- Liaise with outside agencies (re defusing, debriefing, counselling)
- Defuse affected staff/students (within 8 hours)
- Identify students / staff needing further support
- Provide initial support/defusing for parents (within 3 hours)
- Arrange debriefing where necessary (after 507 days)
- Communication of sympathy/concern etc to affected parents

## PROVIDE

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- Information / letter to affected parents
- Information to Press / Media
- Supportive Information Handouts for staff
  - re personal response
  - re understanding student responses
- Review of class work / curriculum for affected year levels

## FAITH RESPONSE

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- Immediate Prayer Support Network Church
- Liaise re funeral arrangements
  - Assistance e.g. music, liturgy
  - Students and staff attending
- Memorial Service/Ritual (after 1 week)

## ONGOING RECOVERY

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- Support for Principal
- Support for affected staff, including office staff

- Support for Intervention Team (Daily debriefing)
- Long Term Initiatives
- (Community & Curriculum)
- Long Term Monitoring / counselling of those affected.

## REVIEW

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Meeting to evaluate the School's response (after approximately 1 week) and recovery (after 3 months in case of serious critical incidents)

## NOTES TO ACCOMPANY ACTION CHECKLIST

### INFORMATION GATHERING

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#### Find out the facts:

The Principal should be notified immediately after the Critical Incident has occurred. The Principal (or their designated representative) will then confirm the incident and collect information about the incident from reliable sources as soon as possible.

If the incident occurs during the school holidays, then the Principal (or his designated representative) will be the initial contact, and will confirm the details.)

Confirmation may be obtained by contacting:

1. The people involved
2. The Police
3. Hospital
4. Parish Priest

Details required may include

WHO?	WHERE?	WHEN?
Student	On Campus	During School
Family Member(s)	Off Campus	After Hours
Staff		On Holidays
Visitor		

### PLAN

The Principal will convene an urgent meeting of the Leadership Team and relevant support Staff. If the incident occurs during the school holidays, the Principal (or his designated representative) will contact the relevant personnel to convene said meeting in order to plan the immediate response, and what should be done on the first day of return to school.

## Appoint

From this meeting, a person will be appointed to co-ordinate the Action/Management Plan devised. In addition, co-ordinators of Counselling/Support, Media Liaison and Parent Contact will need to be appointed (as required). When appointing co-ordinators, care should be taken to ensure that these persons are not traumatized by the event to the extent that their capacity to facilitate response/recovery will be impaired.

## Inform / Consult

### Staff Briefing

The Principal will call a Full Staff Briefing and provide the correct, up to date facts of the incident, and outline the proposed Management Plan (if the incident is during the School Holidays, the Principal will co-ordinate a response which provides the opportunity for a Full Staff Briefing, especially in relation to the Action Management Plan. These meetings will also suggest sources for personal support for teachers, especially if the incident is on campus.

### Inform All Students

To ensure clarity and consistency of information, assemble students and outline the facts of the incident at the earliest opportunity. Whether the assembly is for the whole school or a year level will depend on the situation and the scope of the incident.

### Inform Parents

Immediate contact will be made with parents/relatives of those directly involved. In addition, the Principal shall provide by letter the facts of the incident.

## Consultation / Informing Personnel and Organizations

May include:

1. Providing the facts of the incident
2. Outlining any proposals about the management plan
3. Checking any other suggestions or possible assistance

## Allocate Resources

Ensure that personnel responsible for taking incoming telephone calls are thoroughly briefed as to information to be given and to whom enquiries should be directed, note especially, calls from parents, media.

## Security

- There may be the need to arrange a Security Guard to restrict access to the school grounds. In the interim, school staff (key holders) may be required to supervise the yards and ensure adequate security.
- This role, in the case of police or fire service involvement, may be undertaken by the relevant authority.
- Ensure that adequate information, including facts and relevant responses are supplied to the Media
- Set up a Recovery Room in the School – to isolate upset students to allow them to receive appropriate assistance.
- A designated staff member of the Management Group (e.g. Office Staff, First Aid Rep) shall set up a room with hot and cold drinks and comfortable chairs.

- It may be an advantage to have an outside counsellor in attendance as well as a school staff member.
- Allow distressed students and staff access to this room for several days after the incident.

## INTERVENE

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### Set Up A Support Group For The School

If the magnitude of the incident is too great for school personnel alone to manage, outside agencies will be contacted in order to negotiate access to services of counsellors, psychologists and social workers to provide additional support. (It is essential that the Principal (or his representative) be involved in decision making with outside personnel.)

### Liaise With Outside Agencies

Schools experiencing Critical Incidents commonly report an influx of professionals and well-intentioned people offering counselling and other support. Care should be taken to ensure that only those people whose suitability has been affirmed will take any role in the response and recovery plan. Prior knowledge is a distinct advantage here.

**Defusing** of affected staff and students should be done within 8 hours of the incident. Defusing provides a meeting where, as a group, those affected can retell their experience, clarify the facts, discuss their feelings, learn about normal reactions to trauma and discover some important strategies for coping.

Every attempt should be made to ensure that all affected persons attend defusing meetings. Those people who facilitate the defusing process should be alert to those who may require further support. **Critical Incident Stress Debriefing** (commonly referred to as C.I.S.D.) provides a more structured meeting of those involved in the incident, including those who are part of the response team. In addition, a school may gain considerable advantage from offering a CISD to the Management Team.

CISD is best completed 5-7 days after the event (Provided defusing has already been completed). In very serious cases CISD may need to be completed within 24 hours of the event.

## PROVIDE

### Information to affected parents

#### Press / Media Liaison

- The Media is to be informed by the **Principal ONLY**. The Principal may choose to appoint a staff member of P.R. expert as Media Liaison Person.
- C.E.M. Information Office is prepared to advise on media liaison
- Media contact with staff and students is to be minimized, and the Principal will provide the Media with clear guidelines for making any contact with staff or students.
- The Principal will write the Media Release, and information will be disseminated in a standard form.
- A suitable room will be designated to hold Press Conferences if necessary. If the incident is controversial, then the media may be dealt with by Public Relations experts.

**All office staff**, especially the Receptionist, needs to be briefed as how to handle questions from the media and how to deal with phone calls.

Experience relates that Press/Media will construct a story out of a newsworthy event. Authorities recommend that:

- a. Regarding the media as an ally, and
- b. Providing accurate, up-to-date statements ensure that accurate reporting of the event is most likely to occur.

Staff may require a special meeting to review information handouts, ask questions of concern, and collaborate on any proposed alterations to class work / curriculum.

### **ONGOING RECOVERY**

Ongoing recovery strategies are crucial to the overall wellbeing of staff and students and therefore to the optimum functioning of School. Close attention should be given to the development of an ongoing recovery plan.

### **ON=GOING RECOVERY CHECK=LIST**

#### **WITHIN 48 TO 72 HOURS AFTER THE INCIDENT.**

Restore the school to regular routine as soon as possible

- Provide structure to help students and staff returns to normal functioning.
- Encourage teachers to allow students (especially those more directly involved in opportunities to talk about the incident and about their reactions.
- This is an important part of the recovery process but should be not forced on students

Keep parents informed Inform parents about:

- School Management Plan
- Possible reactions of students
- Source of help for families

Support School Staff

- Encourage two-way communication between parents and school
- Allow time for staff members to deal with their own emotional responses
- Provide support for staff including debriefing by appropriately qualified counsellors when needed.
- Inform staff of the possible effects on students
- Provide advice on how to manage student reactions

Monitor the situation

- Warn of the need for caregivers to monitor their own mental and physical health
- Provide or organize additional personnel if required

## DURING THE FIRST MONTH

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- Arrange a memorial service at school within a week of the incident if students or teachers have been killed in the incident, or remain seriously injured
- Encourage close friends and others directly involved in the incident to participate and be involved in the planning.
- Encourage students to attend funerals
- Convene a meeting of parents of students involved after three or four weeks where a number of students were directly involved. Enlist the aid of counselling professionals to encourage parents to express and share their feelings about their children's welfare and to help them understand their children's reactions
- Encourage staff to be alert for signs of significant persistent changes in behaviour of those affected by the incident
- Some students may not experience or exhibit reactions until days or weeks after the event.
- Students with behaviour changes persisting for more than a month may need specialist professional help

### Monitor progress of hospitalized students

- Ensure hospitalized students have access to counselling support
- Liaise closely with hospital support staff about hospital support programs
- Ensure continued access to counselling support for students on discharge
- Ensure there is a support program for hospitalized students on return to school

### Monitor the mental and physical health of those in caregiver roles

- Burnout Syndrome may occur, especially when the emergency is perceived to have eased.
- Arrange meetings with caregivers (include administrators) to monitor how well they are managing their increased workloads and emotional and physical stress levels
- Remember that students may have caregiver roles

### Monitor the mental health need of caregivers and other helpers

- Adjust workloads where necessary
- Ensure personal support is readily available

## IN THE LONGER TERM

### Monitor the staff for signs of undue stress

- Encourage stressed staff to seek professional help
- Try to provide a supportive environment
- Provide for increased demand on teacher relief time

Continue to monitor mental health of caregivers

- Students in caring roles may develop delayed stress
- Establish procedures for ensuring continuity of monitoring long term effects despite staff changes in the school

**Be alert for and sensitive to the disturbing influences of anniversaries, inquests and legal proceedings**

- Special support for those affected may be needed again at these times
- Make extra staff and services available if necessary

**COMPLETE** Catholic Education Melbourne “Report of a Critical Incident in a School” Form via C.E.M. portal.