

Critical Incident Policy

Village Infant School



Approved by:

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Last reviewed on:

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Critical Incident Policy

(based on 'Managing the response to critical incidents in schools')

Rationale

This policy gives the guidance as to procedures when a critical incident arises in school, or which could have a major effect on the school community. It should be read in conjunction with the policies Health and Safety Policy, Child Protection and Equality Policy.

This policy forms part of the school's Critical Incident Plan. Crisis is normal but when the situation goes beyond normal it may have a profound effect on the school community, and have a deep impact on the future of that community. It may be necessary for the community to seek outside support from different agencies.

What could constitute a critical incident?

Each crisis is unique; the range and complexity are enormous. We cannot plan for every eventuality, but planning ahead is a necessary precaution and can be crucial.

Any incident which involves:

- serious injury or death of a person near, or involved with, the school (child, staff member, friend of the school, etc)
- any incident charged with profound emotion
- any incident attracting unusual attention from the news media
- any incident involving serious threat
- any incident with extremely unusual circumstances which produces a high level of immediate or delayed emotional reaction, surpassing the individual's normal coping mechanisms

Examples of such incidents include:

- murder of a pupil by a pupil
- murder of a pupil by a stranger
- fatal road traffic accidents
- serious/fatal injuries on school visits
- serious infectious diseases e.g. suspected meningitis
- pupil suicide
- teacher suicide
- (sudden) death of pupil or staff member
- the consequence of terrorist or criminal activity
- major arson attacks
- abduction
- accidental death
- allegations of abuse by staff
- rumours of any of the above
- chemical attack
- bomb threat

- intruder on site threat
- snow closure
- school wide communication failure

Purpose

1. To ensure all staff/governors are aware of procedures in the event of a critical incident.
- 2 To ensure that all staff/governors and children are kept safe whether on or off site.
- 3 To ensure parents are kept informed as necessary and appropriate for the situation.
- 4 To ensure the borough Critical Incident Team are involved as soon as possible to help the community come to terms with the incident.
- 5 To ensure any publicity regarding the situation/incident protects the good name of the school and the community.

Guidelines

1. The school has set up a Critical Incidents Team. Each member has a specific job description which has been agreed by the individual team member. (see Appendix 1 for each members job role).
2. The critical incidents management team is comprised of the following
 - Head of Operations – Yolanda Cattle (Headteacher)
 - Deputy Head of Operations – Amy Whiffin (Deputy Head)
 - Head of Communications Head – Louisa Spoor (Office Manager)
 - Head of Site Operations – Richard Wells (Site Manager) Su Joy(SBM)
 - Governor Liaison – Harriet Spoor (Chair of Governors)
3. The safety of children and staff is paramount - only the group leader/deputy group leader (on a visit) or the designated person in school will relay ANY information, and will stipulate to whom it should be divulged.
4. The Critical Incident Team will decide on the way in which parents are informed of the incident, and of how much of the situation it is necessary to divulge.
5. Depending on the incident/situation, the Local Authority Critical Incident Team, contacted through Children's Services will be informed as soon as possible and advice taken as to next steps.
6. There will be a key spokesman (Head Teacher) on the critical incident team who will deal with the media ONLY through the Local Authority's Press Office. A press statement will be sent to the Local Authority's Press Office by phone or fax as soon as possible after the incident.
7. The school's Critical Incidents Management Team will meet on a termly basis to review and where necessary update the critical incidents plan and all associated procedures.

ACTION WITHIN THE FIRST HOUR:

1. Obtain and collate information about what has happened, keeping central notes
 - where and when
 - what

- name and contact of adult at incident
 - extent of injuries, numbers and names
 - location of injured, name and contact number of adult present
 - location of uninjured, name and contact number of adult present
 - is help required from school?
 - who has been informed?
 - what has been said, and to whom?
 - Are emergency services involved – if so which ones?
 - name of liaison officer from the emergency services
2. Gather and brief SLT, Site Manager, School Business Manager & Office Manager
 3. Trigger LA support network through designated contacts.
 4. Contact SLT through mobile phones, if applicable
 5. Liaison with relevant stakeholders
 6. Contact families of children involved
 - must be personal, sensitive
 - names and contacts of all on school visits to be available centrally
 - any message should relay known information and assurances of appropriate action being taken and should indicate if further information will be made available
 - it may be appropriate for parents to come into school to be ready for further information
 - some may need emotional support
 - This will be lead by the Head Teacher with the support of office staff
 7. Make arrangements for informing other parents
 - If there is any possibility of legal liability, police action or a health issue the LAs Human Resource section and/or Health Authority should be contacted before the school issues information to parents.
 - In some cases it will be appropriate to hold a meeting at school, especially if the incident is one which will generate concern about some aspect of the school's organisation (eg following injury or violence at school). SLT can provide a leaflet for parents to accompany a letter home in some situations.
 - A prepared statement should give necessary facts, expression of sympathy /concern and possibly a message for the community. It is important to remember that a letter is likely to be accessible to the media and to seek guidance from the LA press office. It is sometimes better to delay the letter by two or three days until full information is available. Sometimes the letter will need to go out immediately.
 - Heads may wish to consult the LA to check the contents of any such letters or statements.
 8. Inform teaching and support staff
 - All adults in contact with pupils must be kept well informed and feel secure in handling questions and comments. A schedule for updating must be arranged eg during break times, at the end of the day or first thing in the morning. This is to ensure knowledge is common and questions are

answered. Staff should be cautioned about speaking to the media or responding to questions from parents.

9. Inform pupils

- This is best done in small groups or classes with particular care being taken to protect and support both children close to someone involved with the incident and staff who are able to handle the emotions or distress confidently. Children should receive a consistent account of the incident while allowing for differences in their ability to understand.
- Children should only be told what they need to know and this should be appropriate to their age.

10. Encourage people involved to talk

- In some incidences children and staff will want to talk about the incident before they go home.

11. Be ready to deal with the media immediately and in the longer term

- Schools should deal with the media only through the Local Authority Press Office particularly before agreeing to be interviewed or releasing names of children or staff.
- With the Press Office prepare a press release/ script from which anyone confronted by the media can speak. Use a designated spokesperson to make direct response for the school.
- What to do in facing the news media :
 - 1) Do respond to what and when questions.
 - 2) Do tell your story quickly, accurately and get key messages across.
 - 3) Do consider, when possible, the needs of the audience.
 - 4) Do choose your own time to talk to the media.
 - 5) Do prepare and rehearse so everyone has the same story.
- What not to do in facing the news media :
 - 1) Do not reply to how and why questions.
 - 2) Do not speculate.
 - 3) Do not bluff or lie.
 - 4) Do not make 'off the record' comments.
 - 5) Do not make promises you can't keep.
 - 6) Do not make excuses or blame others.
 - 7) Do not respond to 'blind quotes' eg one of your staff says.....
 - 8) Do not say 'no comment' explain why you cannot comment.
 - 9) Do not allow words to be put in your mouth eg 'would you agree that....?'

Effective direct communication within the school community can limit the impact of sensational media coverage. Pupils, staff, governors and parents all need appropriate,

up to date release of information and encouragement not to speculate or to give currency to rumour.

ACTION WITHIN HOURS

People react very differently to the same situation; some will readily give vent to their feelings, others will find it more difficult. Both are normal. Pupils' ages and

development will of course affect their understanding and feelings. Common reactions can be denial, distress, guilt, anger and helplessness.

Handling the reactions of people affected

Information about the incident

- Inform all staff and give guidance on how to support and talk to the children.
- Confront the 'truth' and take care with the form of words in announcements.
- Outline measures in place in school to provide further help for distressed pupils.
- Provide information to families on the kinds of help and support available to them and their children.

Explicit acknowledgement about the incident

The management of a critical incident can result in a good deal of stress:

- Acknowledge the emotional state of staff and children and allow time and space where needed.
- Some staff may not wish or be able to be directly involved in supporting children.
- The burden of support may fall disproportionately on a small number of staff.
- Establish boundaries - avoid 'milling'. Designate areas for parents, supporters, press etc.

Opportunity to talk through or express personal reactions

- Acknowledge that an incident may act as a trigger to children who are emotionally vulnerable, even if they are not directly involved.
- This may result in difficulties in behaviour and relationships.
- Be sensitive to the effects on staff or children's concentration and performance.
- Be sensitive to the effect on home and social life for families and peers.
- Resist expectations of immediate 'counselling'.

Supporters need support

- Be aware of the possible delayed reactions of those actively involved on responding to a critical incident. Staff who are co-ordinating the school's response should be supported and scheduled for relief periods.
- Teachers are vital in supporting pupils through a critical incident; but teachers facing this need deserve informed guidance and emotional support themselves.
- Be aware of needs of others.

Formal and informal recognition and rituals

- Arrangements may be made to express sympathy to families directly affected.
- Injured children can be visited in hospital.
- Children can be encouraged to send cards and letters.
- Plan to attend a funeral, if welcome. (School closure is possible at discretion of Head Teacher and governors).
- Discuss desirability of holding special assemblies and memorial services.
- A memorial may be discussed.
- Anniversaries are key times and the school should ensure such times are planned for and handled with sensitivity and support.

Continuing or quickly establishing usual routines

- Every attempt should be made to provide as much continuity as possible for children.
- Maintain the normal school day so children are unsettled as little as possible.
- Governors and parents can be invaluable.

Return to school by pupils or staff directly affected

- Some may not be attending school after an incident and will need assistance on re-entry.
- Some may have been injured or distressed and will need significant support to re-integrate.

Implications for the wider curriculum

- Inclusion of training for staff in areas such as loss, change or bereavement as part of School Improvement Plan.
- Relevant fiction and non-fiction books in library.
- Relaxation techniques, positive imagery within PSHE.
- PSHE - cycle of life and death.
- Loss, change and bereavement as dealt with by different races and cultures.
Arson Attacks
- The sense of loss, distress and anger can be severe. Dislocation for teachers can be prolonged as they are forced to revisit their distress every day as the loss of their investment in place, planning, resources, records and teaching patterns bears down.
- Pupils and students prey to same emotions.
- Worst effects on teacher morale can occur months after the fire.
- Pressure on staff to restore normal routines quickly on a new or restricted site leaves too little room for grieving, for ritual endings and for reflection.

APPENDIX 1

Staff Cascade

Headteacher to inform Senior Management Team, Phase Leaders, Site Manager & Office Manager.

Office manager to inform administrative staff, Cleaners and Midday Assistants.

Phase Leaders to inform peer class teachers & Classroom Support staff

Parent Cascade

Parents to be informed by notices outside the school or by the office staff by telephone /ParentMail if this is deemed appropriate by the SMT.

Governor Cascade

Headteacher to inform Chairman and Vice Chairman.

Chairman to inform community and other governors or designate to Head Teacher