

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT POLICY

RATIONALE:

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 events on individuals and creates opportunities for individuals to appropriately address their needs for recovery and healing.

DEFINITION:

'A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school.'

Critical incidents may involve students, staff, and other members of the school or local community.

Examples may include:

- A serious accident or tragedy in the school community
- Serious damage to the school through fire, flooding, vandalism etc
- A physical assault on a student or staff member
- The disappearance of a member of the school community
- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, suicide or illness
- Intrusion into the school
- Unexpected evacuation of the school (e.g. bomb threat)
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home
- Closure of the school because of infectious diseases

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

AIMS:

- To ensure that staff, students and the school community know what the Critical Incident plan contains
- To ensure that staff, students and the school community are trained so that they know what they are required to do during an emergency
- To test emergency arrangements at regular intervals to ensure that procedures work and everyone learns emergency protocols

IMPLEMENTATION:

It is the nature of many critical incidents that they come upon us without warning and require immediate thoughtful response through the emergency management plan.

The emergency management plan must:

- describe actions to take before, during and after an emergency to ensure the ongoing safety of staff, students and others

- cover all circumstances when the school is responsible for student safety, such as school excursions to ensure staff and student safety and that students are supervised at all times
- be reviewed annually and/or following an emergency or crisis
- be developed in consultation with relevant emergency services and the Security Services Unit.

This response will be guided by the Critical Incident Management Policy and comprises four components:

- Preparedness – The development of a workplace emergency management plan and the planning and rehearsal of processes to be undertaken when an emergency occurs
- Prevention –The prevention and mitigation of emergencies, including trauma and the identification of risks, specific to the Findon Community 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 and monitoring reactions.

Preparedness

- Findon Primary School will prepare for a range of emergencies including bushfires.
- A site plan is displayed and general description of the school and its environment within the Emergency Management Plan will be available in every classroom.
- Staff will be notified of their roles and responsibilities during a critical incident at the beginning of the year.
- Emergency Management Plans will have clearly identified evacuation assembly areas.
- Emergency Management Plans will display exits from buildings and grounds and also include alternative evacuation assembly areas that are well beyond the school grounds.
- The Emergency Management Plan identifies internal locations within buildings for cases where external evacuation is not appropriate.
- The Emergency Management Plan identifies all emergency services and key personnel contact numbers. These are reviewed and updated on CASES21.

Prevention

- Occupational Health & Safety Officer appointed.
Policies developed for First Aid and Medications as well as Student and Staff Wellbeing 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.
- All firefighting equipment maintained and the location of firefighting equipment to be detailed in the Emergency Management Plan.
- The safe storage of flammable materials in all areas of the school and all combustible fuel, including long grass, surplus equipment removed and documented.
- Repair or replacement of defective appliances and equipment.
- Regular testing and tagging of all electrical appliances and equipment.
- Maintenance of the furnace and switch rooms, and under floor areas free of stored materials.

Response

- The procedures for reporting and responding to an emergency to be followed by staff and students during an emergency will be outlined in the Emergency Management Plan.
- 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 e.g. Guidance Officer, Emergency Management Support Person.

- The initial concern will be for the immediate physical safety and wellbeing of staff and students. As the immediate crisis passes, recovery activities will follow. Short term tasks will include setting up a recovery room and informing staff and 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.*

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, 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 and counselling can be provided by DET and the local Shire 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: This policy shall be reviewed as part of the ongoing policy and process review.

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
- Regular review of related policies such as Equal Opportunity and Harassment
- The provision of professional development for staff.

REFERENCES:

Findon's Emergency Management Plan

Findon's Emergency Management Map

DET policies:

Emergency Management Support

Emergency Management Planning

Medical Emergencies

Reporting (emergency and incidents)

Security Risk Management

Testing Emergency Procedures

WorkSafe Notification

DET Emergencies and Critical Incident Policy

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/pages/emergency.aspx>