



ST MICHAEL'S SCHOOL

Our Community – Learning Together, Caring Together, Growing Together

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

RATIONALE:

St. Michael's School has a duty of care to students, staff and visitors to ensure that they are kept safe from harm. This duty of care is embodied in several areas of legislation including the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*. This policy and procedure will assist greatly in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of students, staff and visitors. Michael's Primary School recognizes its responsibility to support its community in the event of a critical incident occurring.

DEFINITIONS:

An event or circumstance can be described as a critical incident when it causes normally stable and healthy people to experience strong emotional or psychological distress which has the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at a time of the event or later. This distress may be present as trauma responses, grief responses, stress responses, a combination of any of the previous three. As a general rule, a critical incident is determined by its impact on individuals and the community as a whole, rather than by any predetermined list of events. (Jackson, 2005, p5)

A critical incident is an event that is out of the ordinary and is perceived by an individual as threatening and traumatic. It can often involve:

- Rapid time sequences i.e. events developing quickly or requiring rapid responses
- Overwhelming of the normal coping mechanism of the school and disruption to the running of the school
- Perceptions of threat and/or helplessness; and a turning to others for help.

Examples of Critical incidents include:

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease
- Criminal Incidents
- Major accidents, serious injury
- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war (refugees may be traumatised by events that happened elsewhere)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster
- Disappearance of student from home or school
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home
- Threat to life or property, either naturally occurring or intentional,
- Assault causing major threat or physical harm to another person,
- Damage to property that could lead to an individual being seriously harmed.
- Risk of harm to self.

POLICY STATEMENT:

It is the policy of St. Michael's Primary School that steps should be taken to ensure an effective response to crisis situations. To facilitate the optimum response, demonstrate caring and support, take control over the situation and return to normal routines.

PRINCIPLES:

- A critical incident differs from an emergency in that while a critical incident may involve individual injuries, it is usually an isolated event without wider safety consequences for the school community.
- A critical incident may cause emotional and psychological distress during and/or after the incident for those directly involved or for the wider school community.
- The Critical Incident Management Plan has been designed to help facilitate:
 - optimum response at a time of instability
 - recovery
 - return to normal routines
 - a sense of cohesiveness within the school community
 - a sense of responsibility and control over situations which may arise
 - a demonstration of caring and support in a time of need
- A School Critical Incident Management Team will be established to:
 - Reduce psychological suffering
 - Help the school community survive the trauma situation
 - Help reconnect individuals with their coping skills
 - Help the system to return to normal as soon as possible
 - Avoid confusion by providing accurate information
 - Provide a safe place for students to talk about the incident
 - Assist in making appropriate referrals
 - Maintain follow-up with students & staff, if & when necessary
 - Avoid potential liability
 - Help restore and maintain a supportive, positive learning environment
- Roles and responsibilities of CIMT members will be clearly defined for during the event and after the event.
- A short, medium and long term Action Plan will be implemented.

REFERENCES

Catholic Schools Operational Guide, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV), <http://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au/LegalSearch.htm>

School Policy and Advisory Guide, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Victoria, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/spag/default.htm>

Policy Created: August 2012

Ratified:

Future Review: 2017

Implementation:

Critical Incidents will be overseen by the School Leadership Team in conjunction with CEO support.

Roles and Responsibilities will include

Role	Intervention Phase	Postvention Phase
Leadership Role:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confirm the event• Activate the C.I. response team• Express sympathy to family• Clarify facts surrounding event and communicate to staff• Make contact with other relevant agencies• Contact and inform Family/Friends of incident (NB comprise list of who needs to be contacted directly)• Establish lines of communication with agencies dealing with incident with a view to being kept informed of developments as they occur.• Decide whether a site visit is appropriate (Site visit by Principal or person nominated by Principal)• Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students *• Facilitate any appropriate memorial events• Review plan <p>* Enlist the support of an outside support person to return for regular staff wellbeing checks</p>
Communication Role:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• With team prepare a public statement• Organise designated room to address media promptly• Ensure telephone line free for outgoing and important incoming calls• Liaison with relevant outside support agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response
Student Liaison/ Counselling Role:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parent support and general support for staff• Advice and guidance for staff• Establish a common dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ongoing support to vulnerable students and staff NB: it may be appropriate to arrange release from duties for some staff• Monitor class most affected• Refer on, as appropriate Review and evaluate plan

<p>Chaplaincy Role , with the assistance of school Leadership Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit home, if appropriate • Assist with prayer services • Make contact with local clergy • Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff/students/family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide follow-up support to family in conjunction with Community Liaison Role. • Work in partnership with religious education team • Review and evaluate plan • Offer to link family with community support groups
<p>Family Liaison Role: Centacare Worker/Leadership Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate contact with families (following first contact by C.I. Team Leader) • Keep families of pupils involved informed of current developments in incident. • Consult with family around involvement of school in possible events e.g. funeral service • Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ongoing support to bereaved/affected family/families/staff • Involve as appropriate family in school liturgies/ memorial services • Review and evaluate plan

Action Plan

Short-Term Actions (Day 1)

- Immediate contact with families involved in incident /communicate to staff and arrange staff meeting, if required.
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service.
- Contact with families of the other children affected
- Ensure a quiet place can be made for pupils/staff ; eg: Prayer room/quiet space, meeting room, Parent room

Media Briefing (0 - 24 hours)

- Designate a spokesperson. (Leader)
- Prepare a brief statement. (Team)
- Protect the family's privacy.
- Gather accurate information.
 - What happened, where and when?
 - What is the extent of the injuries/fatalities?
 - How many are involved and what are their names?
 - Is there a risk of further injury?
 - What agencies have been contacted already?

Contact appropriate agencies

Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team

- Organise a staff meeting, (distribute what information needs to be conveyed to families and how)
- Organise timetable/routine for the day, including arranging extra support staff.(Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible).
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc., or any other relevant information and give to the student Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of pupils : provide extra assistance for classroom/s directly affected e.g. a second teacher to be in the classroom for the immediate week

Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service.

- The Centacare Worker/Principal liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service.
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate.(Principal + Class Teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.

Medium-Term Actions (24-72 Hours)

- Preparation of pupils/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of pupils/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of pupils/staffs responses, eg Sympathy cards, flowers, book of condolences, etc. (NB: ensure these are checked before becoming public/being passed to family)
- Ritual within the school.
- Review the events of first 24 hours.

- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team. (NB: suggested Principal and DP, Centacare Worker and external CEO staff member)
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/pupils/staff.
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students and staff members.
- Have reviews- Critical Incident Management Team meeting/Staff meeting at end of day
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.

Arrange support for individual pupils, groups of pupils, staff and parents, if necessary.

- Hold support/information meeting for parents/pupils, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened.
- Classroom Teacher/Centacare Worker to speak separately(depending on age) with students, as required in order to clarify, explain etc.
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out and provide avenues for classroom teachers to withdraw from their rooms if emotionally overcome. NB: it may be appropriate to arrange release from duties for some staff during the immediate circumstances as well as in the medium to long term
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings. NB: this may need to be ongoing

Plan for the re-integration of pupils staff e.g., absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc.

- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school; and speak/plan with staff before siblings etc return to school
- Plan Visits to injured.
- Centacare Worker + Class teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital.

Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service(to be decided).

- Decide this in accordance with parents' wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends.

School closure/Special Arrangements regarding staffing coverage

- Request a decision on this from school management/CEO support.

Longer Term Actions

- Monitor Pupils/Staff/Parents for signs of continuing distress
- NB: If, over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance:- (refer child to Centacare Worker for appropriate intervention)
 - Uncharacteristic behaviour
 - Deterioration in academic performance
 - Physical symptoms - e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
 - Inappropriate emotional reactions
 - Increased absenteeism.
- Arrange Visit from external support person to monitor/ follow-up with pupils directly affected (NB special consideration for younger students needs)in classroom
- At an appropriate time (e.g. the following term, before the year's end etc)Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately
 - What do we hold on to?
 - What do we let go?
 - What do we need to take on?
 - Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
 - Is there any unfinished business? e.g. Are we OK?, How do we acknowledge that individual staff (and we as a group) have experienced a critical incident? What follow-up support is needed?
- Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future- include ongoing PD.
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate.
- Ensure that new staff is aware of the school policy and procedures in this area.
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way.
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, it may be appropriate or useful to brief the Principal of the new school.
- Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries.
 - Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in pupils/staff and they may need additional support at this time.
 - Acknowledge the anniversary with the family.
 - Be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Mother's Day, and Father's Day.
- Plan a school memorial service e.g. plant tree(closure)
- Care of deceased persons possessions. What are the parents wishes?
 - Update and amend school records.