



RESPONDING TO A TRAUMATIC OR CRITICAL INCIDENT INVOLVING A SCHOOL.

- Schools 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.

ACTION TO BE TAKEN

Incidents vary in complexity. These guidelines provide a framework for action and would not necessarily be followed in all cases. However the following 4 principles must be followed: -

- Provision of clear accurate information.
 - Description of action to be followed.
 - Provision of help for all affected.
 - Maintenance of normal school program.
1. Check for dangers and make the area safe
 2. Apply First Aid, and call 000 if necessary.
 3. Isolate the area, and remove students
 4. Obtain accurate information. Deal only with substantiated facts.
 5. Contact the Department of Education if necessary. All emergency or criminal activity in which the safety or well-being of staff or students is at risk, or where there is a threat to property, must be reported immediately to the Department's 24 hour Emergency and Security Management Branch on ph: **(03) 9589 6266** and WorkSafe on ph: **13 26 60** as appropriate.
 6. As soon as possible inform staff, especially those most directly involved. Inform close friends and family individually. Allow questions and discussion as they arise. Dispel rumours.
 7. Appoint a skilled Support Team to assist in the management of the incident. The team may include staff members, counsellors, external Department of Education personnel, support agencies etc. The size and composition of the team will be related to the nature of the incident. Distribute names of Support Team members, and inform others of the role of the team.
 8. As soon as possible provide information to the community as to what has happened, and what is being done.



9. The principal and/or School Council president will deal with all media requirements. Advice to be received from Department of Education if possible. A written press release may be useful. If necessary, protect others from contact with the media.
10. Establish an open line of contact with the family or families directly involved.
11. Provide out of school hours contact if necessary. This could be as simple as circulating the Principal's telephone number. In more complex situations it may mean maintaining telephone contact at the school.
12. Continue contact with the family to identify their expectations of the school, e.g. student participation in funeral or memorial service.
13. Try to identify those most likely to need help, e.g. classmates, teacher, special friends.
14. Ensure that counselling and help is available.
15. Continue to keep staff, students and parents informed, especially about what has happened and what the school is doing about it.
16. As soon as practicable call students together and provide information about what has happened and what the school is doing about it. Reassure the student body.
17. Provide counselling for all. Ensure that there are suitable places in which this can take place. Be prepared to modify the timetable and other arrangements so that people are free to make use of available help.
18. The class teacher may be the person to whom students first turn for help.
19. Children wishing to attend funerals should be a parent decision. Should do so in the company of their parents. Provide meaningful participation for those not actually attending the service.
20. Conduct an Incident Investigation – implement controls.
21. Continue normal routines at school but acknowledge the effect of incident on the school community. Be flexible with those in need of help. Be aware that many people may be deeply affected, e.g. an event may cause a person to recall some traumatic event involving them in the past. The anniversary may also be a difficult time.
22. Maintain links with the family. The school and family may wish to develop a memorial garden, erect a memorial plaque, or display a photo in a prominent position in the school.
23. Monitor, be sensitive to, and respond to staff and student's needs over a period of time.
24. Look after yourself.....take a break!
25. Review this process after any significant incident.