



St Mary's Primary School Critical Incident Policy

Policy Statement

Emergencies and critical incidents can affect people physically, psychologically, and emotionally and can have an impact on program continuity. The purpose of this policy is to ensure St Mary's School is prepared for an effective response to emergency and critical incidents through appropriate resources. The prevention and effective management of emergency situations and critical incidents can assist to minimise the negative impact of an unexpected event.

Rationale

The school may become directly or indirectly involved in a tragic or traumatic event to which it must respond appropriately. These guidelines provide a framework for action, but may not be necessarily appropriate for all situations.

Definitions

An **emergency** is an unplanned or imminent event that affects or threatens the health, safety or welfare of people, property and infrastructure, and which requires a significant and coordinated response. The defining characteristic of an emergency event or situation is that usual resources are overwhelmed or have the potential to be overwhelmed. Emergencies may be a specific event with a clear beginning, end and recovery process or a situation that develops over time and where implications are graduated rather than immediate.

A **critical incident** is an unexpected traumatic event involving personal or professional threat, which evokes extreme stress, fear or injury. Providing appropriate support following a critical incident is part of emergency management.

Implementation

Gather Information

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

Confirmation may be obtained by contacting:

- i. People involved
- ii. Police
- iii. Hospital
- iv. Parish Priest

Details required may include:

Who	Where	When
Student	At school	During school hours
Family member/s	Away from the school	After hours
Staff		On holiday
Visitor/s		

Plan

The Principal (or delegate) will convene an urgent meeting of the Leadership Team and relevant staff.

The latter may include:

- Deputy Principal
- Parish Priest
- Student Wellbeing Leader
- Student Services Leader
- Religious Education Leader
- Classroom teachers and other staff
- Outside agencies
- CEM personnel
- Staff member to be responsible for setting up of recovery

If the incident occurs during the school holidays, the Principal (or delegate) 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 coordinate the Action / Management plan devised. In addition, coordinators of Counselling/Support, Media Liaison and parent contact will need to be appointed (as required).

When appointing coordinators, care should be taken to ensure that these persons are not traumatised by the event, to the extent that their capacity to facilitate response/recovery will be impaired.

Inform/Consult

Immediate Notifications

1. Appropriate emergency services
2. Victorian Emergency Management Coordinator by phone
3. Education Consultant at Catholic Education Melbourne
4. Neighbouring schools (if appropriate)

Brief Staff

The Principal (or delegate) 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's Office will coordinate a response which provides the opportunity for a full staff briefing, especially in reaction to the Action Management Plan).

These meetings may also suggest sources for personal support for teachers, especially if the incident is on campus.

Inform Students

To ensure clarity and consistency of information, assemble students in class or small groups and outline the facts of the incident at the earliest opportunity. Whether the assembly is for the whole school or year

level will depend on the situation and the scope of the incident.

Inform Parents

If appropriate, immediate contact will be made with parents / relatives of those directly involved. In addition, the Principal (or delegate) shall provide by letter the relevant facts of the incident to all parents.

Consult/Inform Personnel and Organisations

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.
4. Ensuring that adequate information, including facts and relevant responses are supplied to the Media

Allocate Resources

- a) Ensure that personnel responsible for taking incoming telephone calls are thoroughly briefed as to information to be given and to whom inquiries should be directed. Note especially, calls from parents, media.
- b) There may be the need to arrange for Security Guards to restrict access to school grounds. In the interim, staff may be required to supervise the gates and ensure adequate security. This role, in the case of police or fire service involvement, may be undertaken by the relevant authority.
- c) Set up a Recovery Room at school (Staffroom) to isolate upset students to allow them to receive appropriate assistance. A designated staff member of the Management Group 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 staff member. Allow distressed students and staff access to this room for several days after the incident.

Intervene

Establish an open line of contact with the family or families directly involved.

a. 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 delegate) be involved in decision making with outside personnel).

b. 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 who are suitable are involved. Prior knowledge of resource personnel is a distinct advantage here.

c. Defusing

Every effort should be made to ensure defusing of affected staff and students be done within eight 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 reaction 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.

d. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

Commonly referred to as CISD provides a more structured meeting of those involved in the incident,

including those who are part of the response team. Those who need additional support (beyond that provided by the defusing process) should be included here.

In addition, a school may gain considerable advantage from the offering of a CISD to the Management Team. Any CISD must be coordinated by a professional eg: Psychologist.

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

- a) Provide out of school hours contact if necessary. This could be as simple as circulating the Principal's (or delegates) telephone number. In more complex situations it may mean maintaining telephone contact at the school.
- b) Continue contact with the family to identify their expectations of the school, e.g. student participation in funeral or memorial service.
- c) Information to affected parents
- d) Try to identify those most likely to need help, e.g. classmates, teacher, special friends.
- e) Continue to keep staff, students and parents informed, especially about what has happened and what the school is doing about it.
- f) If necessary, 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.
- g) The class teacher may be the person to whom students first turn for help.
- h) Students wishing to attend funerals should be encouraged to do so in the company of their parents. Provide meaningful participation for those not actually attending the service.
- i) Continue normal routines at school but acknowledge the effect of tragedy 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.

Press / Media Liaison

- a) The media is to be informed by the Principal (or delegate) only. The Principal (or delegate) may choose to appoint a staff member or PR expert as Media Liaison Person.
- b) Media contact with staff and students is to be minimised and the Principal (or delegate) will provide the media with clear guidelines for making any contact with staff or students.
- c) The Principal (or delegate) will write the Media Release, in consultation with relevant staff or Board members if it is necessary and then information will be disseminated in a standard form.
- d) A suitable room will be designated to hold Press Conferences if necessary. If the incident is controversial, then the media will be dealt with by the Public Relations experts or the CEM Director.
- e) All office staff need to be briefed as how to handle questions from the media and how to deal with phone calls.
- f) Staff may require a special meeting to review information handouts, ask questions of concern and collaborate on any proposed alterations to class work / curriculum.

On-going Recovery

- a) Ongoing recovery strategies are crucial to the overall well-being of staff and students and therefore to the optimum functioning of the School. Close attention needs to be given to the development of an on-going recovery plan.
- b) 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.
- c) Be sensitive to staff and student's needs over a period of time.

Post Incident Reporting to CECV Industrial Relations Unit

Incidents which occur during school hours, during camps, excursions or outdoor adventure activities, which occur during travel to or from school, involve the media, or issues for potential negligence or legal liability must be reported as required by the Catholic Education Commission Victoria, School Incident/Accident/Near Miss Report. The School Incident Report can be found on CEVN-ISS under Data Collection.

The purpose of this report is:

- For schools to meet their legal requirements under the Accident Compensation Act 1985
- To obtain information from schools about school-related injury, illness or near-miss situations.
- To identify areas of concern and assist in the development of OHS policy and prevention programs

In line with reporting on emergency management / accident incident reports as outlined by the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, the Principal (or delegate) would determine the appropriateness of contacting WorkSafe and/or any other relevant agency.

Ongoing Recovery Checklist

1. Within 48 - 72 Hours after the Incident

- a) Restore the school to regular routine as soon as possible
 - i) Provide structure to help students and staff return to normal functioning
 - ii) Encourage teachers to allow students (especially those directly involved in opportunities to talk about the incident and about their reactions. This is an important part of the recovery process, but should not be forced on students
- b) Keep parents informed, about:
 - i) School Management Plan
 - ii) Possible reactions of students
 - iii) Source of help for families
- c) Support school staff
 - i) Encourage two-way communication between parents and school
 - ii) Allow time for staff members to deal with their own emotional responses
 - iii) Provide support for staff including debriefing by appropriately qualified counsellors when needed
 - iv) Inform staff of the possible effects on students
 - v) Provide advice on how to manage student reactions
- d) Monitor the situation
 - i) Warn of the need for caregivers to monitor their own mental and physical health
 - ii) Provide or organise additional personnel if required

2. During the First Month

- a) 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
- b) Encourage close friends and others directly involved in the incident to participate and be involved in the planning
- c) Encourage students to attend funerals with their parents/caregivers
- d) 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
- e) Encourage staff to be alert for signs of significant persistent changes in behaviour of those affected by the incident
 - i) Some students may not experience or exhibit reactions until days or weeks after the event
 - ii) Students with behaviour changes persisting for more than a month, may need specialist professional help
- f) Monitor progress of hospitalised students

- i) Ensure hospitalized students have access to counselling support
- ii) Liaise closely with hospital support staff about hospital support programs
- iii) Ensure continued access to counselling support for students on discharge
- iv) Ensure there is a support program for hospitalised students in return to school
- g) Monitor the mental and physical health of those in caregiver roles
 - i) Burnout Syndrome may occur, especially when the emergency is perceived to have eased. Adjust workloads where necessary
 - ii) Arrange meetings with caregivers to monitor how well they are managing their increased workloads and emotional and physical stress levels
 - iii) Remember that students may have caregiver roles. Ensure personal support is readily available.

3. In the Longer Term

- a) Monitor the staff for signs of undue stress
 - i) Encourage stressed staff to seek professional help
 - ii) Try to provide a supportive environment
 - iii) Provide for increased demand on teacher relief time
- b) Continue to monitor mental health of caregivers
 - i) Students in caring roles may develop delayed stress
 - ii) Establish procedures for ensuring continuity of monitoring long term effects, despite staff changes in the school
 - iii) 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.

EMERGENCY AND RECOVERY: TELEPHONE NUMBERS

EMERGENCY: Police, Fire Brigade, Ambulance	000
Police Station: Malvern Police Station 288 Glenferrie Road, MALVERN.	(03) 8823 5600
Hospital: Cabrini Hospital 181-183 Wattletree Road, MALVERN	(03) 9508 1222
Catholic Education Victorian Emergency Management Coordinator	(03) 92670404
Catholic Education Melbourne: Manager, Student Wellbeing Unit - Dennis Torphy	(03) 9267 0228 0408 565 063
Catholic Education Melbourne: Regional Manager, Southern Region - Debra Egan	(03) 8301 7400 0400 482 524
Catholic Education Melbourne: Acting Manager, Communications and Marketing	(03) 9267 0228 0409 860 884
CECV Industrial Relations Unit	9267 0228
Carnegie Medical Centre: 232 Koornang Road, CARNEGIE	(03) 9568 5300
St Mary's Parish Office	(03) 9571 2407
St Mary's Parish Priest	Monsignor Stuart Hall
Telstra – call tracing	13 2200
Victoria State Emergency Service	1800 226 226
Child Protection Crisis Line	1800 135 135
Child Abuse Protection Services	1800 688 009
Family Drug Support	1300 368 186
Poisons Information Centre	13 1126
Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria	1800 015 188

Review

Every policy will have an approved review date nominated. Policies may be reviewed before the review date in response to relevant changes, or as requested by the Principal or School Board.

Approved by the Board: Wednesday 6 May, 2020

Review Date: As per the Review Policy