

TINTERN GRAMMAR CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT POLICY

1.0 Purpose

To ensure Tintern Grammar students, staff and community are supported in the event of a traumatic or critical incident in which the school is involved. The school plan describes how to give support to individuals or groups within the school community and to assist them to return to a proper level of functioning. The plan identifies who is responsible for ensuring that the recovery needs of individuals and groups exposed to trauma are assessed. Arrangements for using trauma specialists are also described.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to staff, students, board members, contractors, volunteers and visitors attending activities at Tintern Grammar who may experience trauma as a result of a critical incident. It covers incidents which may cause extreme stress, fear and injury and may or may not be considered emergencies.

3.0 Policy

A Critical Incident is typically an unforeseen occurrence or event that is likely to, or clearly has had, a significant detrimental effect on the physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing of staff, students, families, the wider school community and the reputation of Tintern Grammar. It also includes events may occur outside of school hours and within the wider community. Such events normally carry with them the possibility of a “traumatic response”. A traumatic event may include any situation faced by members of our extended school community which causes members of the community to experience unusually strong emotional reactions or an event which has the potential to interfere with the school’s ability to function normally. Major emergencies demand a full-scale response involving external support from the emergency services and a range of agencies. Other events may be less severe and can be managed using school resources according to the Critical Incident Management Plan and/or Tintern Grammar Emergency Management Plan developed in conjunction with First 5 Minutes.

The response to an unforeseen event and an assessment of the need for recovery activity will not be determined by whether the event is described as a critical incident, emergency or disaster. The key to providing an effective response relies on the event being defined in terms of its impact on people.

The Principal and staff who have responsibilities under the School Emergency Management Plan will assess each incident carefully and determine the appropriate level of response.

Each emergency must be assessed to determine the potential impact on the school community. Assessing the emotional impact of an event, the extent to which school routines are destabilised and the numbers of students, staff and parents who have been affected will assist in determining the level of response required. It may be necessary to consult with specialists (Davidson Trahaire Corpsych) who are trained in trauma management before deciding that no one has been affected or requires immediate or ongoing support.

A planned process in which prevention, response and recovery activity is well coordinated, can reduce the impact of an emergency. The measure of calm which pre-planned procedures bring to an event can influence an individual or group's perceptions about whether the event is traumatic or not.

3.1 MANAGEMENT OF CRITICAL INCIDENT FOR AN OVERSEAS STUDENT

The Home Stay and International Student Coordinators and other support staff involved in the School's overseas student program (such as Pastoral Care staff) receive training in this Critical Incident Management Policy to help them manage emergency situations and critical incidents concerning International Students at the School.

Further detail regarding the process for managing Critical Incidents for Overseas Students is outlined in the International Student Risk Management and Mitigation Overview.

3.2 THE CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Tintern Grammar's Critical Incident Management Plan (attached) describes how school staff will respond to an immediate threat during an emergency and how they will manage the ongoing consequences (if any) of that event. The emergency itself and the threat to physical safety is typically short lived, often lasting minutes or a few hours.

It is extremely important for the effective immediate and long-term management of a critical incident, and the subsequent wellbeing of those involved, that all events are dealt with and not simply ignored. Those who have been involved need reassurance about what has happened to them and the support that the school can offer.

Appendices providing guidance in the implementation of the Critical Incident Management Plan.

Appendix A: Common reactions to trauma

Appendix B: Coping with and mapping trauma

Appendix C: Reactions to death or loss, coping with suicide helping students cope after a suicide

Appendix D: Initial emergency record

Appendix E: Sample letters to the School community

While each critical incident will be unique and will occur in different circumstances there are a number of features common to all for which pre-planned arrangements can be developed. Common pre-planned arrangements include:

- Allocation of roles and responsibilities
- Notification and reporting arrangements
- Actions to identify the level of risk
- Actions required to maintain the safety of those involved
- Liaison with emergency services and other agencies
- Assessment of impact of event on those involved.

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THE TINTERN GRAMMAR CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

This section outlines the main areas considered in developing the school’s critical incident management policy and procedures. The school’s plan includes prevention, preparedness, response and recovery strategies.

The more promptly recovery activity is commenced the more likely it is to be effective. It is often possible to begin recovery activity while an emergency is still underway. Where this is not practicable, recovery activity must commence within one to three days if it is to be effective. A good recovery management program will assist in the recovery of affected individuals and facilitate a speedy return to school routine.

A: Establishing a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

This team will take on the planning tasks and its implementation during a “critical incident”. The principal will be notified immediately of a critical incident and is responsible for the overall co-ordination of the team, it’s responses and communications. The following points need to be considered in developing the team:

The CIMT will consist of:

- Principal and/or Vice Principal
- Director of Admissions & Marketing
- Chaplain
- School Counsellor
- Relevant Head of School or Managers (such as International Student Co-ordinator)
- Others as invited

This group will set:

- (i) Priorities
- (ii) Allocate tasks
- (iii) Oversee Care Program
- (iv) Specify communication strategies

Immediate CIMT tasks

	Responsible	Complete (Y/NA)
Gather information regarding incident		
Call emergency services if necessary		
Enact Emergency Management Plan if appropriate		
Administer First Aid if required		
Ensure incident site is secure, safe, clear and undisturbed		
Account for all relevant people		
Notify Principal		
Call together the CIMT and consider the level of response that might be required.	Principal or delegate	
Decide on the particular make-up of the CIMT in this particular incident	Principal or delegate	
Allocate responsibilities to individual staff	Principal or delegate	
Liaise with the appropriate emergency services using their emergency numbers (if no power use a mobile phone)		

Ensure that staff and students are safe from injury or harm and if necessary allocate responsibility for evacuation and assembly of staff and students		
Record details on the Initial emergency record form		
Allocate responsibilities to individual staff		
Allocate responsibility for management of information including telephone calls		
Allocate responsibility for coordinating media requests for information		
Allocate responsibility for provision of information parents who arrive at the school		
Coordinate routine school activities including the teaching program		
Notify staff about the emergency		
Notify parents of students first, then brothers and sisters in the school		
Establish a recovery room for affected students and a waiting room for parents		
Inform students within the school		
Ask for staff volunteers to monitor the recovery room		
Actively seek information from the police, hospital or elsewhere		
Inform Tintern Grammar Board		
Inform the school community		
Monitor school community reactions and support those in care giving roles		
Set aside time to brief key staff and to review responses		
Co-ordinate routine school activities including teaching program		

Short-term tasks (firs 24 hours)—setting up a recovery room

	Responsible`	Complete (Y/NA)
Designate a room where people know they can quickly locate support staff		
Appoint a staff member, preferably with first aid knowledge, to supervise the recovery room and to support those who are very distressed		
Monitor students for shock reactions and have someone available to provide first aid if required		
Set up a student recovery room well away from classrooms, or several rooms during a large incident, close to toilets and with comfortable chairs and tissues		
Provide a separate recovery room for staff		
Allow distressed staff members and students reasonable access to the room		
Ensure that several adults are available to monitor and assist students during a large or complex incident where a large number of students may be affected		
Set aside a room for parents with tea and coffee making facilities, which is separate from students to avoid having them congregate around the school		

Encourage students to gather in smaller friendship groups rather than larger groups		
Keep a list of students who are attending the recovery room		
Give students a task to undertake such as making a card or writing a letter to the injured person as soon as practicable		
Contact parents of students who remain in the recovery room and alert them about possible concerns.		

Short-term tasks—informing staff

Having verified information:

	Responsible	Complete (Y/NA)
Call emergency staff meeting to provide known facts, dispel rumours, establish a common reference base and opportunity to outline the preliminary recovery management arrangements.		
Provide staff with a brief outline of the incident		
Provide a brief factual outline to others within the school community on a need to know basis		
Inform staff as soon as possible about a serious emergency involving death or injury which occurs after hours, on the weekend or during school holidays		
Inform staff about arrangements for holding a briefing meeting before informing students at the start of the next school day.		

Before the start of the next school day hold follow up briefing meeting with staff:

	Responsible	Complete (Y/NA)
Verify and restate factual information about the incident, so that staff can understand what has happened and the information will sink in		
Talk with staff about the reactions they may experience		
Outline recovery management arrangements		
Inform staff about procedures for dealing with the media		
Discuss procedures to be followed by staff during the day		
Discuss guidelines for informing our students and ways of answering questions from students		
Provide teachers with a written summary for use as a reference when discussing the incident with students		
Ensure staff have time to have questions answered and to talk about the incident amongst themselves.		

At the end of the day

	Responsible	Complete (Y/NA)
Meet with staff to review the day, to allow staff to share the trauma of the day, and identify students at risk		
Ensure that CIMT members are available to offer support and guidance.		

Teachers

- Provide a factual account of the incident at the beginning of the first class, in a way that ensures that everyone hears the same information
- Limit speculation and rumour by providing factual and relevant information about the incident
- Inform students about the location of counselling services and recovery rooms
- Inform students about arrangements for memorial services, funerals and appropriate ways to express condolences
- Outline arrangements for the day.

Short-term tasks

Short-term tasks—informing close friends

	Responsible	Complete (Y/NA)
Contact the bereaved family or police to ascertain what information may be released within the school		
Prepare a factual written statement, without graphic detail, for use as a reference by teachers when discussing the incident with students.		
Determine whether to tell students about the incident at a whole school assembly, by year levels or individual classes depending upon the nature of the incident		
Discuss with teachers who feel uncomfortable raising the event with students and arrange for support from another teacher or a member of the recovery team		
Identify staff that may be too distraught to take classes and arrange replacements from within the school		
Notify close friends of the dead or injured, prior to making an announcement to other students		
Take students aside when they arrive at school and inform them privately		
Consider contacting the students or our families at home prior to the start of the school day		
Ensure that individual attention is given to intimate friends who are likely to have special needs beyond those of other students.		
Inform other students soon after briefing staff and close friends		
Ask teachers to mark a roll to identify who has been informed and who has not.		

Short-term tasks—informing parents and the school community

Parents, Board of Directors, other members of the school community and neighbouring schools will want to know what has happened and to assist if possible. It is important that they are given factual information and that the information has been approved for public release.

	Responsible	Complete
Confirm the release of information with those directly affected and the police		
Send a letter to parents about the incident		

Advise parents about the recovery arrangements which have been put in place		
Provide copies of Appendices A and B to parents		
Explain to parents that adolescents are likely to seek comfort from our peer group rather than their parents and adults		
Provide a recovery room for parents and run parent briefings as required.		

Short-term tasks - Managing the Media

School staff need to be aware that any incident which combines injury with children is likely to interest the media. Electronic and print media will take every opportunity to fulfil their legitimate role in providing public information.

In many cases, media will be at an emergency affecting a school group before staff at the school know there is an emergency.

Sensationalising events can have adverse effects on the recovery process and may in fact create trauma for some people.

News crews and journalists may be expected to use any means at their disposal to obtain a story if school staff refuse to talk to them. The school should actively control the media, coordinate media requests for information, issue media releases, schedule press conferences and nominate someone to take part in interviews. In return for providing scheduled taped and on camera interviews, the media will normally respond favourably to school requests to refrain from uninvited interviews of students or parents in the school grounds.

The school should use the media productively to assist recovery efforts when the initial emergency is over.

In many cases, the police will assume responsibility for media liaison. Before school staff agree to providing interviews, it is important to check whether it is appropriate and what information can be discussed publicly. In general, school staff will restrict comment to the emergency itself, the reaction of the school community and the support mechanisms in place to assist staff and students. School policy will not be discussed.

The Principal or their delegate should be the only member of staff to speak to the media.

Coordinating media coverage

- If staff are contacted directly by Media, refer call immediately to Principal's Office.
- If phoned by media unexpectedly, buy time if necessary. "I am in a meeting at present. Can I take your number and ring you back".

Refer to the Director of Admissions & Marketing/Communications & Marketing and Events Coordinator

- Use holding statements if approached directly by media on Tintern Grammar grounds.
- "My name is _____ and I am the _____ at Tintern Grammar. Yes there has been an incident. Give no details. I do not know any of the details. Our Principal (or nominee) is available to talk to you. If you would like to follow me to the Media Centre (Boardroom) I will arrange for our spokesperson to speak with you.

- For a serious media crisis, a Media Strategy Group may need to be formed and meet as soon as possible to implement next steps:

	Responsible	Complete (Y/NA)
Decide if the issue warrants immediate contact with media consultants/external public relations/journalist.		
Designate a media spokesperson.	Principal or delegate	
Clarify objectives and begin data gathering on the issue immediately		
Establish key audiences for the incident: eg media, school families, Board, government and other educational bodies and stakeholders (VRQA, ISV etc), general public, Anglican Church		
Prepare a standard media response including: - Outline of facts - what school has done to assist those affected - outline support and recovery arrangements - Include name and contact number for school's media co-ordinator		
Liaise with family regarding any statements made to media		
Remind staff and students not to communicate with media including on social media		
Set rules for persistent media		
Keep a record of media enquiries and contacts		
Negotiate acceptable locations for interviews		
Check that information provided does not conflict with legal requirements		
Consider level and type of internal communication required.		
Decide if media conference is needed. Set up Media Interview Room		
Decide if media conference is needed. Set up Media Interview		
Pre empt line of media questioning/angles and develop sample questions.		
Monitor social media responses		
Rehearse interviews with colleagues, practise holding statements, and ideal Responses		

Medium-term tasks

Medium-term recovery

Medium-term recovery management requires school staff charged with the responsibility of managing emergencies to restore school routine. At the same time, provision will be made for the ongoing support of members of the school community. It is at this time that funerals and associated rituals take place and when people are often most emotionally vulnerable, yet wanting to return to normal.

Medium-term tasks – during the first week

	Responsible	Complete (Y/NA)
Reconvene CIMT		
Monitor support needs of school leadership		

Provide information and encourage support networks among parents		
Restore regular school routine		
Allow opportunities to talk about the incident and reactions		
Monitor and support reactions within the school community		
Reiterate information about reactions as required		
Use specialist support staff to assist staff, students and parents		
Provide information updates about the condition of anyone in hospital		
Prepare public expressions of farewell such as obituaries and wreaths when a death has occurred		
Communicate any funeral arrangements to community in keeping with wishes of family		
Be aware of cultural and religious differences in response to death and what the funeral may entail		
Keep parents informed; parents may wish to meet together		
Monitor those in care giving roles		
Consider referring students with persistent behaviour changes to a counsellor or specialist agency		
Liaise with community support agencies such as churches, funeral directors, community health centres, and police		
Liaise with neighbouring schools		
Keep a scrapbook of eulogies and sympathy cards in a central location for members of the school community to read		
Monitor media coverage of the event to identify areas which may be causing difficulty or distress for students and staff		
Refer staff who are concerned with issues of legal liability to professional associations		
Suggest that staff make detailed notes for their personal reference about the event and their part in it		
Suggest that staff obtain copies of any official statements they make		
Use replacement class room teachers to enable staff to attend the funeral.		

Long-term tasks

Long-term recovery

Long-term recovery management requires a continuing awareness of individual needs and reactions and a process for managing those responses. It is also useful at this time to re-examine the school's emergency and critical incident management plans, to revise the plan on the basis of what worked well and what didn't work. Strategies which were found to be useful during the emergency will be included in the plan for future use.

Long-term tasks

	Responsible	Complete (Y/NA)
Monitor and support members of the school community, particularly on significant dates such as anniversaries		
Consider long term intervention activities such as the need for ongoing counselling or other specialist support		
Reconvene key people at regular intervals to review the school's response and the		
Effectiveness of planning arrangements		

Revise the school emergency management and critical incident management plans in light of experience gained		
Continue liaison with outside agencies and maintain contact networks		
Consider a ritual of marking significant dates		
Prepare for legal proceedings, if necessary.		

Long-term issues

Recovery can take up to 3-years or even longer. Significant dates or events such as anniversaries, or the taking of annual school photos may bring about re-emergence of symptoms. Six-months after the initial incident is a critical time.

The affected group may feel forgotten as time passes by and relationship problems may emerge. Those who were drawn together by a shared experience are likely to start pulling away from each other and establishing new networks. Family cohesion may be altered as different members grieve and respond differently.

Grief, longing and pain may be particularly strong or may return on anniversary dates such as birthdays, the date that the incident occurred, or other significant dates such as Christmas. Marking these days may be helpful in giving concrete expression to such feelings.

Individuals may continue responding to triggers that remind them of the event for a long time. Hot, windy days often unsettle people who have experienced bushfires for many years after the experience.

Media may continue to use footage of an event for years, especially when a similar event occurs. This may be distressing and unsettling for some people. Reactions may appear weeks or months later and could be triggered by another loss.

Children will grieve more intermittently and over a longer period of time than an adult. The intensity of the emotions cannot be sustained for very long, so children will let the grief go, allowing it to return in small spurts.

Long-term tasks

	Responsible	Complete (Y/NA)
Consider the significance of anniversaries and plan commemorative activities if appropriate		
Monitor students for signs of change including relationship problems, drug dependency, hyper arousal, increased susceptibility to illness and accidents		
Prepare people for coronial inquests and legal proceedings providing them with knowledge about what to expect		
Review the curriculum and include or enhance life skills programs and bereavement education where appropriate		
Acknowledge the work of school-based and specialist care givers and continue to monitor their wellbeing, particularly when things start to quieten down and they may start to reveal their own views about the experience		
Inform any new teacher about the child's or the class's experience and possible triggers which may cause a re-emergence of symptoms		

Alert regular specialist support staff about any concerns regarding students or other members of the school community.		
Consider the significance of anniversaries and plan commemorative activities if appropriate		

Appendix A

Characteristics of traumatic events

Traumatic incidents tend to have characteristics in common. They:

- Are extremely dangerous or distressing
- Are sudden and unexpected, providing no opportunity to prepare for them
- Disrupt one's sense of control of events around them
- Disrupt one's beliefs and assumptions about the world, people and work
- Challenge the belief that the world is a fair and equitable place
- Challenge the belief that events can be understood
- Include elements of physical or emotional loss or risk of loss.

Examples of such events which school staff may be expected to deal with include:

- The murder or serious injury of a student or staff member
- Suicide of a student or teacher or friend
- Sexual or physical assault
- Acts of violence or threats of violence
- Death of a student from a terminal illness
- Siege, hostage, abduction, missing student
- Diagnosis of a life threatening illness of a teacher
- Physically destructive events such as fire, flood, lightning, windstorm
- Excursion and tour injury or loss
- Mandatory report of abuse of a student
- The cumulative effect of a series of small scale incidents
- Media coverage of a sensitive issue
- Serious injury or death resulting from a school motor vehicle / bus collision.

The school will involve suitably qualified and experienced professionals with specialist expertise in trauma assessment where any doubt exists about the impact of a critical incident.

Trauma and the individual

Under normal circumstances, people feel that they have control over their lives and are safe from physical harm. Individuals are said to be affected when they experience a range of stress responses from the memory of an event which has shattered normal feelings of safety and their sense of control over their lives. The extent to which a particular event has an impact on an individual depends to some extent on how much it alters normal feelings of safety and control over what has happened.

Trauma may arise from:

- Direct exposure
- Witnessing the emergency
- Hearing about it.

When trauma is experienced alone, an individual may feel:

- Helpless
- Terrorised
- Tearful
- Vulnerable.

Groups of people may be affected by the additional pressure to respond in a certain manner. Members of a community may have to contend with the additional damage that rumours and misinformation can cause. When trauma affects an entire community, secondary stressors may develop and further traumatise individuals.

Common reactions to trauma

Common reactions to traumatic events in the pre-school years

Physical Reactions

- Sleep disturbance
- Bowel and bladder difficulties
- Small ailments requiring comforting
- Acute awareness of things and events
- General arousal
- Increased jumpiness and uneasiness

Impact on Thinking

- Reduced attention span
- Reduced ability to play constructively
- Active fantasy life, may replay the event and change details

Behavioural Reactions

- Tearfulness
- Unwillingness to be left alone
- Aggression
- Fearfulness
- Anxiety
- Overactive behaviour/restlessness
- Apathy
- Lack of cooperation
- Irritability
- Return to younger behaviour
- Excessive concern for others
- Difficulty coping with change
- Display of awareness of events beyond
- Age expectations, particularly in play

First-Aid Support

- Provide support, rest, comfort
- Provide a structured environment where the rules are clear
- Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event
- Provide time to draw and play
- Provide ongoing, consistent care
- Provide a predictable routine
- Provide security and reassurance to counter separation anxiety
- Monitor the child and note any change in temperament and behaviour

Common reactions to traumatic events in children

Physical Reactions

- Change in eating habits
- Nausea
- Sleep disturbances
- Bowel and bladder problems
- Clumsiness
- Headaches
- Small ailments requiring comforting

Impact on Thinking

- Preoccupation with trauma
- Reduced attention span
- Reduced ability to play constructively
- Memory problems
- Confusion
- Seeing the event over and over
- Compensatory themes in play which may involve killing the perpetrator or creating a super hero for retribution

Behavioural Reactions

- Tearfulness
- Unwillingness to be left alone
- Aggression
- Fearfulness
- Anxiety
- Overactive behaviour/restlessness
- Apathy
- Lack of cooperation
- Irritability
- Return to younger behaviour
- Excessive concern for others
- Difficulty coping with change
- Display of awareness of events beyond age expectations
- Acute awareness of things and events
- Helplessness – passive responses
- Difficulty identifying what is wrong
- Sensitivity to media coverage
- School refusal

First-Aid Support

- Provide support, rest, comfort
- Provide a structured environment where the rules are clear
- Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event
- Provide time to draw and play
- Provide ongoing, consistent care
- Provide a predictable routine
- Provide security and reassurance to counter separation anxiety
- Monitor the child and note any change in temperament and behaviour

Common reactions to traumatic events in younger adolescents

Physical Reactions

- Headaches
- Visual and perceptual problems
- Sleep disturbances
- Nausea
- Skin problems
- Reckless behaviour
- Appetite disorders

Impact on Thinking

- Interference with concentration and learning
- Distortion of the event
- Fear of ghosts
- Preoccupation with the traumatic event
- Impaired memory and recall
- Intrusive recollections
- Preoccupation with revenge

Behavioural Reactions

- Decreased school performance
- Attention seeking
- Rebellion at school or at home
- Preoccupation with own actions during the event
- Specific fears set off by reminders or when alone
- Retelling or replaying the event
- Reluctance to express feelings
- Concern about own and others safety
- Reckless, invulnerable behaviour
- Interest in parents' response to the event
- Concern for parents' recovery
- Disturbed grief responses
- Reluctance to disturb parents with own anxieties
- Refusal to go to school
- Excessive concern for victims and their families
- Competition with brothers and sisters
- Displaced anger, aggression
- Insecurity
- Regressive behaviour
- Failure to perform responsibilities
- Emotional labelling of common reactions
- Strong identification with peers
- Mood swings
- Need to conform with peers in response to event
- Truancy

First-Aid Support

- Provide support, rest and comfort
- Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event and address the distortions
- Provide time to talk about events, fears, dreams
- Help identify traumatic reminders and anxieties and encourage children not to generalise
- Develop a supportive environment that allows the expression of anger, sadness
- Confirm that these feelings are normal
- Encourage support networks
- Identify physical sensations felt during the event
- Help child to retain positive memories when working through intrusive traumatic memories
- Provide a structured and predictable environment to provide a sense of security
- Monitor the child and note any changes in temperament and behaviour
- Encourage child to let significant others know about the event

Common reactions to traumatic events with older adolescents

Physical Reactions

- Headaches
- Aches and pains
- Appetite disorders
- Sleep disorders
- Skin disorders

Impact on Thinking

- Recall of vivid disturbing images
- Radical attitude changes
- Memory disorders
- Poor concentration
- Cognitive distortion of the event
- Preoccupation with trauma

Behavioural Reactions

- Decreased school performance
- Attention seeking
- Rebellion at school or at home
- Competition with brother or sisters
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Lack of emotion
- Need to repeatedly go over details of event
- Detachment, shame, guilt
- Fear of being labelled abnormal
- Self-consciousness about emotional responses (fear and vulnerability)
- Increase in self-destructive, accident prone behaviour (drugs, sexual)
- Life threatening re-enactment
- Premature entrance into adulthood or inhibition to leave home
- Strong identification with peers
- Mood swings
- Need to conform with peers in response to event
- Truancy

First-Aid Support

- Provide support, rest, comfort
- Provide realistic, age appropriate, information about the event
- Encourage discussion of the event emphasising realistic limitations of what could have been done
- Encourage peer acceptance and understanding of emotional responses
- Provide information about safe ways of relieving psychological discomfort
- Encourage postponing radical life decisions
- Link attitude changes to the impact of the event
- Acknowledge significance of event for them
- Encourage support networks
- Encourage constructive activities on part of injured or deceased
- Help to hold on to positive memories as they work through the more intrusive traumatic events

Court Appearance

Students and staff should be adequately prepared for appearance in court. The Student Counsellor should always be consulted. Students may be prepared by involving them in:

- Role plays
- Discussion of the nature of the criminal or coronial court process
- Visits to court prior to appearance
- Meeting the clerk of the court
- Standing in the witness box
- Warning of likely distressing points in the hearing
- Discussion of possible media coverage and limitations imposed by the court
- Previewing evidence including video footage.

It is recommended that on the day of the hearing anyone attending court:

- Eat breakfast
- Bring a cut lunch to avoid having to leave the court complex or being confronted by the media
- Try and ignore the media
- Refer all media requests to a nominated media spokesperson
- Ensure that support is available to members of the school community as information and findings are released during the court process.
- The Victorian Court Network is a voluntary service, which provides support and advice to people required to attend courts in Victoria. Staff can assist in preparing individuals in the school community for their court appearance.

Working with students after a traumatic critical incident:

The classroom setting enables teachers to monitor individual reactions within a supportive environment. Death, injury or other significant emergencies are usually more effectively managed in a classroom setting rather than at a general assembly or over the public address system. Teachers will establish a climate of open communication to help students work through issues such as unresolved conflicts which traumatic events may cause to resurface.

There will be a wide range of reactions to the news of an incident, injury or death. Some students may be visibly affected while others may show no sign of distress. Dealing with, and responding to news of an emergency is a very individual experience. Individual characteristics, such as how a person interprets the event, previous experiences and the relationship to the injured or deceased

are all factors that influence how people will respond. Young children and adolescents can be affected by what they hear from others about an incident.

Use **protective interrupting** strategies if a story or details become too graphic for some students. Protective interrupting requires the teacher to stop an anecdote being told in a public forum. It may be possible to change the direction of a discussion by distracting or diverting the student. The student will be given an opportunity to tell the story in a more appropriate setting alone with the teacher.

It is useful to:

- Allow opportunities to talk about the incident and reactions, taking the opportunity to explain that different people respond in different ways
- Explain that a range of reactions may be experienced, that the reactions are normal, that people react in a range of ways and with time and support the reactions will ease
- Repeat the facts as often as requested
- Allow students to opt out of discussion
- Encourage older children to talk and to piece together a clear picture of what happened
- Use the natural tendency of children to repeatedly question what happened as a useful means of dispelling rumours and myths.

When providing support to students try to:

- Provide support and comfort
- Sit quietly with the child, say little, accept silence
- Accept initial emotional reactions
- Use minimal prompts such as *“you’ve had a frightening experience”*
- Tell children that you are sorry such an event occurred and you want to understand and assist them
- Provide information about what has happened and what is being done to help
- Use active listening and empathy skills
- Be alert for anyone who appears to be in shock who may need medical attention
- Acknowledge the experience and normalise the reactions *“you’ve had a frightening experience—no wonder your hands are shaking”*
- Bring a calm presence to the situation
- Provide ongoing support to individuals when they receive additional information such as notification of deaths, or when collecting personal effects
- Ensure that support is available at home before the student leaves the scene
- Be guided by the child and listen to what the individual wants
- Start from the children’s point of understanding
- Ask children to tell you what happened in their own words
- Allow opportunity for play, some children seek to get a better understanding of what happened through play
- Allow children to talk over concerns with someone they have chosen, including another teacher
- Respect the need for adolescents to seek support from their peer group and to be with their friends rather than with adults.

Try to avoid statements in which students are told:

- It will be all right because it may not be
- They are lucky it wasn’t worse as such statements rarely console anyone who is affected
- About death using abstract explanations or euphemisms, gone to sleep, passed away
- How they are feeling.

Practical ideas for the classroom

Children and adolescents need to give concrete expression to their trauma and grief. The following activities may be useful in helping children come to terms with the event:

- Answer children's questions simply and directly. If the questions are too hard or seem inappropriate or it is distressing to answer them, ask the child to suggest an answer. This can help both teacher and child start to discuss the feeling behind the question being asked
- Talk with students about what made that person special
- Make cards or drawings expressing how sad they feel and maybe include a special memory of that person
- Create a memory box where students can write a memory of that person and store them in the box
- Write goodbye letters
- Make an audiotape using a starter such as *What I'd like to say to ...*, *Was special because ...*
- Compile a collection of edited student drawings about their classmate and present it to the child's parents
- Collect photographs of the child at the school and present them to the child's parents, eg class, excursion, concert, sporting photos
- Provide a special place within the school where students and staff can place memorials and tributes
- Use story books and novels to discuss life events
- Make up a story book about the child
- Allocate a sports trophy or award in the name of the deceased
- Organise a tribute or commemorative activity such as planting a special plant or laying a plaque
- Prepare the rest of the class for the return of students affected by the emergency
- Use journal writings as a way of monitoring a student's responses
- Collect and donate money to specific charities or illness foundations when a student has died from a terminal illness
- Discuss the cause of the event as a lead into prevention and preparedness issues
- Mobilise support from friends; let them discuss how they can support their friend
- Engage in accident prevention activities
- Use student's desk as a focal point for memorials, tributes and good byes
- Use photos for memorial activities, particularly with intellectual impaired students
- Make a colouring book about the event
- Consider grief and loss education programs provided by grief associations or funeral homes
- Write personal biographies as a class activity with chapter headings which could include: *My Parents, Grandparents, Brothers and Sisters, Family Tree, Family Gatherings, Birthdays and Weddings*
- Make use of personal safety feelings posters to discuss the range of emotions or make your own feelings posters in class
- Use strength cards to compile a list of the special things about the student
- Use books included in resource list at back.

Funeral arrangements and rituals

Rituals serve an important function for both adults and children. These rituals assist in:

- Reducing unreality
- Counteracting fantasies
- Getting some understanding of what is happening
- Helping individuals to work through the event
- Saying goodbye
- Establishing a shared understanding of the event

Viewing the body

In some cultures, viewing the body is seen as an important part of the ritual. Students can be helped through this process by an adult who is able to describe what they will see when they enter the room. An adult who enters the room first to see the dead person is then able to describe the room to those students who wish to view the body. The description can also include the casket and how the appearance of the dead person may have changed, eg visually and in terms of touch and temperature change. It is equally important for adults to be prepared for this experience.

Attending the funeral

It is generally beneficial for children to attend the funeral, although generally this should be in the company of a parent or guardian.

It may be helpful to invite the minister or priest conducting the service to be available to answer students' questions and to describe the planned ceremony.

Some families are willing to allow classmates to assist in planning the rituals. They may be able to participate in the ceremony by reading eulogies, choosing music, or by placing a flower on the casket. It is also important for adults to be prepared for the funeral ceremony. There are a range of cultural and religious differences in response to death and it is essential that members of the school community who are attending the funeral are briefed beforehand on what will happen during the ceremony and burial. Funeral agencies may assist with further information and support.

There are also some practical needs to consider when large numbers of students are attending a funeral:

- To minimise fainting or hyperventilation encourage students to remove coats or jumpers prior to the ceremony
- Have a first-aid trained person to assist distressed students
- Have cold drinks and cool face washers available
- Prepare for a media presence at the funeral
- Arrange students and staff to return to the school for coffee and sandwiches after the funeral to allow monitoring of reactions and support
- Organise a time for students not attending the funeral to bring their memorials and floral tributes to a nominated room at the school and for someone to take them to the funeral on their behalf

Appendix B

Coping with and mapping trauma

Hints for staff

- Familiarise yourself with the contents of the School's Critical Incident Management Plan
- Learn about reactions that may be experienced by helpers in this area
- Be aware that you may experience reactions similar to those of people who have directly experienced the trauma such as sadness, anger, helplessness, and anxiety.
- Be aware that working with affected people can trigger memories of loss and trauma in your own life
- It's okay to say 'no' to doing specific tasks
- Assist with administrative work, teaching duties, help to restore normal school routines
- Try to stay calm
- Clarify your responsibilities during and after the incident
- Pace yourself knowing that you may be involved in critical incident management for days or even weeks
- Ensure that confidential information about others is not discussed
- Talk through your experiences with someone you trust and use available
- Support mechanisms
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible
- Reduce the intake of such stimulants as tea, coffee, alcohol and chocolate
- Eat well-balanced, regular meals, even if you don't feel like it
- Maintain a reasonable level of activity, including exercise routines

Appendix C

Reactions to death or loss, coping with suicide and helping students cope after a suicide

Suicide, like other forms of sudden death and trauma affects the whole school community. Managing recovery after a suicide is especially difficult as it is often surrounded by taboos, myths and secrecy.

The secrecy that often surrounds suicide develops a climate in which it is difficult for students to gain assistance with their own reactions and depression. If we manage the event successfully we are likely to be less at risk of copycat suicides or related risk-taking behaviours.

It is important for teachers to monitor students who may be at high risk following a suicide, particularly those who show extreme reactions, are particularly close to the deceased or who have had previous traumas in their lives. Students may express feelings of guilt or responsibility for the death.

Short-term tasks

- Where possible, check with parents to determine what information can be released
- Inform staff about the death and discuss ways of dealing with students
- Inform students about the death in an honest and sensitive manner
- Be aware of affected brothers and sisters, close friends, girlfriends or boyfriends
- Provide unambiguous information to staff and students which will dispel rumours
- Avoid providing excessive detail about the method used to bring about the death, the motivation, family reaction etc
- Do not glorify or romanticise the death or encourage others to do so
- Encourage discussion which emphasises that the person chose to commit suicide
- Discourage students from apportioning or accepting blame
- Use active listening skills to support students who want to talk about the death
- Wait for students to raise issues rather than forcing discussion when they may not be ready to do so
- Provide students with information about grief reactions and the grieving process
- Emphasise that grief reactions are normal and that they will disappear over time
- Reassure students that there is no right way to feel or react in these circumstances
- Encourage students to talk to their parents about the suicide
- Provide information to students and parents about support services which are available through the school and the community
- Identify a quiet room where students can go if they need a quiet area

Medium-term tasks

- Continue to monitor those students who are most affected or at highest risk
- Encourage students to use networks of friends
- Discuss with students how they might support one another
- Provide staff with information about warning signs and risk factors
- Ensure that provision is made for staff to deal with their own grief
- Prepare staff and students for the funeral.

Long-term tasks

- Continue to monitor the school community over the long-term
- Be aware of the significance and sensitivity which surrounds anniversaries, sporting events, school photos, team lists, roll calls etc
- Review the school's response to death and suicide and accommodate changes to the curriculum and personal development policies where appropriate.

Appendix D

INITIAL EMERGENCY RECORD

Date: _____

Time of notification: _____

Name of person taking the call: _____

Position: _____

Name of person reporting the incident

Contact telephone number _____

Details (describe the incident in as much detail as possible describing who was involved, how, where and when it occurred, who is injured, nature and extent of injuries, where is everyone now, what action is being taken to help)

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS REQUIRED

- **Principal notified YES / NO Time:** _____
- **Other School staff YES / NO Time:** _____

Staff notified: _____

Emergency services notified YES / NO Time: _____ (which services, record names of officers, stations, telephone contacts)

Photocopy as required

Appendix E

Sample letters to the School community

Prompt communication with all parents in the school following an emergency will help them to understand what has happened and will also help to dispel rumours which can be extremely destructive.

An information letter will be sent to all parents within 24-hours of the emergency. Further information may also be communicated to parents as a special item in regular school communications

Information to be included in the letter will be verified for accuracy and confirmed as available for public release with police. In some cases, police or others may not want certain information to be published, even though it may be widely circulating informally within the school community.

Each of the sample letters has 5 functions.

It tells:

1. The facts
2. That the school has done
3. The school's plans
4. How their children may react
5. How to get help