



St Kevin's

Critical Incident Policy

Rationale:

Our vision statement promises that we will strive to promote a culture of relationships which uphold the dignity of each person and ensure that all have a sense of belonging. In the event of critical incidents, we are called to be guided by this promise. Critical events may occur in any community and require sensitive, structured and agreed processes. It is important that an immediate response is provided in order to assess the situation, provide initial support and determine appropriate actions.

Aims:

At St Kevin's, we aim to support students, staff, parents and the community through critical incidents with thoughtful and timely management procedures and communication processes. We also aim to promote a climate of understanding and resilience and to maintain and implement up to date emergency management plans.

Implementation:

DEFINING CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Critical incidents are any events that render persons or property in danger, evoke severe distress, disrupt individual or organizational functioning, or have the potential to leave lasting effects on those involved. They can include:

- o The death, sudden or anticipated, of an individual known to the community
- o Traumatic event or traumatic bereavement
- o An event whose circumstance may include:
 - Suddenness and lack of anticipation
 - A degree of preventability and randomness
 - A threat of personal safety

MOVING FROM RESPONSE TO RECOVERY

It is vital to recognize the importance of the recovery phase associated with critical incidents. Whilst the initial incident and the immediate response are clearly identifiable and recognizable dimensions of critical incident management planning and procedures, the work undertaken in the recovery phase may significantly influence the extent to which individuals and groups will cope with the long term effects which can flow from a critical incident. Recovery activity addresses the immediate and longer-term physical and emotional wellbeing of individuals and the community at large. The distress response to a critical incident can be immediate, but can also be delayed.

PEOPLE WHO MAY BE AFFECTED

When a critical incident affects a school community, individuals in that community will play various roles and encounter different experiences and responses. Careful attention to the various individuals and groups affected provides a guide for school leaders and support personnel in identifying those who are most likely to need assistance. School leaders should be mindful of students and staff:

- Those directly exposed to the incident

- Those vulnerable though not directly exposed to the incident
- Staff and students
- Helpers/recovery personnel
- Other members of the school and wider community

GRIEF AND TRAUMA DISTRESS

Whilst there is considerable overlap, grief and trauma responses are distinct reactions with their own emotional, behavioural, physiological and cognitive manifestations. When ordinary people are exposed to bereavement or traumatic events distress, denial and disbelief are normal reactions. In the first hours and days, and sometimes weeks, after such events, people may be stunned and dazed, and more so if the impact has been sudden and devastating. The search for comfort and soothing, and for safety and structure will be paramount.

Bereavement

Grief is the reaction to the loss of a significant other, most often due to death. Grief responses can include a range of:

- Feelings (e.g., anger, sadness, intense yearning, numbness and shock, fatigue, guilt);
- Physiological responses (e.g., sleep and appetite disturbances, tightness in the chest or throat, hollowness in the stomach)
- Cognitions (e.g., disbelief, confusion, preoccupation, visual and auditory hallucinations); and
- Behaviours (e.g., social withdrawal and avoidance of duties, dreams, crying, avoidance of reminders of the loss or alternatively pre-occupation with remembering)

ON-GOING RECOVERY

It is important that school leadership recognizes and acknowledges that a critical incident is rarely 'over' when the initial days are complete. It is also important to restore the school to regular routine as soon as possible and provide a structure to help students and staff to return to normal routines.

Memorial Service/Ritual

This event is a ritual conclusion to the formal, initial response.

A review of curriculum content may be indicated.

Attention to significant dates needs to be maintained.

A review of the progress of the overall school community should be established so that those who may need extra support can be identified.

REVIEW

Schools can learn valuable lessons from actively reviewing the response process. This can be effectively achieved relatively soon after the event (e.g. a week or two), and again in approximately 3 months (this ensures the ongoing recovery response have been adequately attended to).

OTHER ISSUES FOR ONGOING RECOVERY

Ongoing recovery is crucial to the overall wellbeing of staff and students. Some members of the school community may suffer have long-term impact from the event. Others may have delayed reactions - sometimes emerging weeks or months after the event. In some cases, adverse effects can even be seen years later - for example if another life challenging event occurs.

AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER AN INCIDENT:

- **Restore normal school routines as soon as possible**
- **Keep parents informed about:**
 - School management plan
 - Possible reactions of students
 - Sources of help
- **Support school staff**
 - Encourage two-way communication between parents and the school
 - Monitor ongoing impact on the staff. In some cases, the additional burden imposed on the staff by their personal reactions to an incident, or the responsibility of dealing with students ongoing issues, can be extremely stressful.
 - Allow time for staff members to deal with their own emotional responses - this may include engaging extra personnel to enable the provision of some relief from teaching or extra duties for a time.
 - Provide support for staff by making confidential support and/or counselling by appropriately qualified counsellors where needed (ACCESS through Centacare).
 - Provide staff with details of possible emotional/behavioural effects on students, and how best to manage such reactions.
 - Provide advice: how to distinguish between what might be regarded as 'normal' reactions and those that may require intervention and/or referral.
- **Monitor the situation**

Be aware that those responsible for caregiving at a time of crisis are often under unusual and exceptional stress. The management team, the Principal (especially) and staff should be aware of the need to monitor their own mental and physical health.
- **Monitor all affected staff and students.** This is an important part of the recovery process.

DURING THE FIRST MONTH

Monitor parents and provide information and strategies for supporting their children. Encourage staff to be alert to signs of significant or persistent changes in behaviour of those affected. Some students may not experience or exhibit reactions until days or weeks after the event. Students with behaviour changes persisting for more than a month may need specialist support.

IN THE LONGER TERM

- **Monitor staff for signs of undue stress**
 - Try to provide a supportive environment
 - Allow for the provision of external professional help for stressed staff
- **Continue to monitor wellbeing of caregivers**
- **Be alert** for and sensitive to any disturbing influences of anniversaries, inquests and legal proceedings.
- **Remember anniversaries**
 - Offer memorial services if appropriate.
 - Send anniversary message to the family.

Evaluation:

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's four-year review cycle.
 N.B. Reviewed November, 2017. **Next review 2021.**

Reviewed by SDC: Nov 2017	Reviewed by Staff: July 2018	Ratified by Ed Board: July 2018 (or TBA)	July 2021
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