



Critical Incident Policy

Rationale

St James recognises that directly or indirectly the school must be prepared if involved in a tragic or traumatic event to which it must respond appropriately. These guidelines provide a framework for action and would not necessarily be followed in all cases.

Goal

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for action should the school need to respond to a critical incident.

Definition

A critical incident denotes a disaster or crisis situation that causes people to experience strong emotional or psychological distress which has the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the time of the event or later.

Among the critical incidents that may affect the school community are:

- The death or critical injury of a student, teacher or prominent school community member
- The destruction of the whole or part of the school
- Major vandalism
- Students witnessing serious injury or death
- Natural disasters
- Terminal illness of a member of the school community
- Use of violent weapons in the school
- Media coverage of issues in a way that creates concerns in the school community

Implementation

- **GATHER INFORMATION**

The Principal needs to be notified immediately 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 in order:

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

Details required may include:

Who	Where	When
Student Family members Staff Visitors	At school Away from the school	During school hours After hours On holiday

- **PLAN**

The Principal will convene an urgent meeting of the School Improvement Team, and may also include:

- Classroom teachers
- Other staff
- Outside agencies
- CEM personnel
- Parish Priest
- A nominated 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 the first day of return to school.

From this meeting, a person will be appointed to coordinate the Action / Management plan devised.

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 or recovery will be impaired.

- **INFORM/CONSULT**

Immediate Notifications (refer Emergency Management Steps)

1. Appropriate emergency services
2. Victorian Emergency Management Coordinator (Harry Allard: 0439642881) by phone
3. As soon as possible forward Incident Report via fax or email to Harry Allard
4. Principal Consultant (CEM Regional Office: 9724 0209)
5. Neighbouring schools (if appropriate)

- **BRIEF STAFF**

The Principal 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 ALL 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, where appropriate.

- **INFORM PARENTS**

Immediate contact will be made with parents / relatives of those directly involved. In addition the Principal shall provide by letter the facts of the incident to all parents.

- **CONSULT / INFORM ORGANISATIONS / AGENCIES**

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.

- **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 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**

- a) **Establish an open line of contact** with the family or families directly involved.
- b) **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 be involved in decision making with outside personnel).
- c) **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.

d) Defusing

Defusing of affected staff and students should 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.

e) 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 the school may gain considerable advantage from the offering a CISD to the Leadership Team. Any CISD must be coordinated by a professional eg: Psychologist.

CISD will be 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**

- 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.
- Continue contact with the family to identify their expectations of the school, e.g. student participation in funeral or memorial service.
- Information to affected parents
- Try to identify those most likely to need help, e.g. classmates, teacher, special friends.

- Continue to keep staff, students and parents informed, especially about what has happened and what the school is doing about it.

- 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.
- The class teacher may be the person to whom students first turn for help.
- Children 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.
- 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**

The media is to be informed by the Principal only. The Principal may choose to appoint a staff member or PR expert as Media Liaison Person. Media contact with staff and students is to be minimised and the Principal will provide the media with clear guidelines for making any contact with staff or students.

The Principal will write the Media Release if it is necessary and information will be disseminated in a standard form.

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.

All office staff need to be briefed as how to handle questions from the media and how to deal with phone calls.

Experience relates that Press/Media will construct a story cut out of a newsworthy event: Authorities recommend that it is best to:

- Regard the media as an ally.
- Provide accurate up-to-date statements or press releases.
- Ensure that accurate reporting of the event is most likely to occur.
- 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**

On-going 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.

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.

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 St. James 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

Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's four year review cycle and after each critical incident event. This policy was revisited in 2019 by the staff and ratified by the Education Board.

EMERGENCY AND RECOVERY: TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Police, Fire Brigade, Ambulance	000
Police Station Nunawading	9871 4111
Hospital Maroondah	9871 3333

Catholic Education Victorian Emergency Management Coordinator (Harry Allard)	Mobile: 0439642881 Office: 92670404 Fax: 94159325 Email: hallard@ceo.melb.catholic.edu.au
Catholic Education Office Eastern Region	Office: 9724 0200 Fax: 9724 0201
Principal Consultant	Marwan Austerbery: John Corkhill 9724 0200
CECV Industrial Relations Unit	9267 0228
The Medical Centre 5 Boronia Rd, Vermont	9874 3344
Parish Office	9873 1341
Telstra – call tracing	13 2200
State Emergency Service	13 2500
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
St. Vincent de Paul	9386 6666
COUNSELLORS	
Centacare	9873 4344