

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

PURPOSE

Tecoma Primary School personnel are required to respond effectively and efficiently to emergencies which affect our school community. Emergencies which school personnel may be expected to deal with include:

- death (including suicide) or serious injury of a student, parent or staff member
- sexual or physical assault
- acts of violence or threats of violence
- cyber-bullying and inappropriate use of social media, the internet, etc.
- siege, hostage, abduction, missing student
- diagnosis of the life threatening illness of a member of the school community
- physically destructive events such as fire, flood, lightning, storms
- injuries to student and staff
- mandatory reporting of abuse of a student
- the cumulative effect of a series of small scale incidents
- media coverage of a sensitive issue

Some events are readily characterised as emergencies. 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 or may require a response which can be managed using school resources. Principals and teachers have responsibilities to fulfil under the Tecoma Primary School's Emergency Management Plan and will assess each incident carefully. Many types of emergencies will be similar, but the circumstances in which they occur will usually be different. Each event will be considered according to the circumstances at the time to determine the appropriate level of response.

Traumatic incidents tend to have characteristics in common.

They:

- are extremely dangerous or distressful
- are sudden and unexpected, providing no opportunity to prepare for them
- disrupt one's sense of control of events around them
- disrupt one's belief 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.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all student, staff and parents of Tecoma Primary School.

POLICY

Responding to a traumatic or Critical Incident in which the school is involved:

The School 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. It is essential that a Critical Incident Recovery Team be formed to manage the short and long term effects.

Action to be taken as a result of a Tragic/Traumatic event which involves the school:

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:

- 1. provide clear, accurate information**
- 2. describe the actions to be followed**
- 3. provide help for all affected**
- 4. maintain a normal school program as close as possible**

Obtain accurate information. Deal only with substantiated facts.

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.**

Appoint a skilled Critical Incident Recovery Team to assist in the management of the incident. The team may include staff members, psychologists, counsellors, external DET personnel, support agencies etc. The size and composition of the team will be related to the nature of the incident. Distribute names of the Critical Incident Recovery Team members, and inform others of the role of the team.

As soon as possible provide information to the community as to what has happened, and what is being done.

Appoint a skilled Critical Incident Recovery Team member to respond to media enquiries. A written press release may be useful. If necessary, protect others from contact with the media. Advice regarding this may be obtained from the DET Emergency Communications Centre and the DET Media Unit.

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

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.

Try to identify those most likely to need help, e.g. classmates, teacher, special friends. Some students not directly affected may become distressed.

Ensure that counselling help is available. Contact the Regional Office and/or DET 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 Security Service Unit (SSU) on **(03) 9589 6266**.

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

As soon as possible call students together and provide information about what has happened and what the school is doing about it. A follow up letter home may be important.

Provide counselling services 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 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.

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.

APPENDICIES

- Appendix A - Critical Incident Recovery Plan (CIRP)
- Appendix B - Critical or Traumatic Incident Plan – First 24 hour Short Term Tasks
- Appendix C - Emergency Message Record Form – Template

REFERENCES

- DET - School Policy and Advisory Guide - Emergency Management Planning: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spaq/management/pages/mgtplanning.aspx>
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 [http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/f932b66241ecf1b7ca256e92000e23be/575C47EA02890DA4CA25717000217213/\\$FILE/06-024a.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/f932b66241ecf1b7ca256e92000e23be/575C47EA02890DA4CA25717000217213/$FILE/06-024a.pdf)
- DET - School Policy and Advisory Guide - Emergency and Critical Incident <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spaq/management/pages/emergency.aspx>

REVIEW CYCLE AND EVALUATION

This policy was reviewed on **1st April, 2019** and will then be reviewed as part of the school's five year review cycle and following any critical incident at the school. This policy is due to review in **April, 2024**