



# Critical Incident Planning Policy

Committee with oversight for this policy – Finance Leadership & Management	
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# **Ravenor Primary School**

## **Critical Incident Planning Policy**

### **Introduction**

Handling crises is not a normal part of school life, but they do sometimes occur. Some incidents, however, are of a more critical and overwhelming nature in which staff, pupils and parents may experience acute, even prolonged distress. A critical incident can be described as an event or events outside the range of normal human experience, of significant personal distress to a level which potentially overwhelms normal responses, procedures and coping strategies and which is likely to have an emotional and organisational consequences.

The Headteacher has overall accountability for this policy and in his or her absence the Deputy Headteacher has accountability.

A list of critical incidents may include:

- Death, terminal illness, life-threatening condition;
- Involvement in an accident;
- An incident at school such as fire or attack;
- Loss in a pupil's family;
- Witnessing violence or war

Those with experience of dealing with critical incidents have indicated a number of important factors, including:

- The suddenness of the occurrence;
- The shock effect;
- The apparent uniqueness of the occurrence;
- The need for any support to be available very rapidly;
- The publicity and attention which sometimes follow;
- The need to communicate with a number of people quickly;
- The need for support for those directly affected, and for the large number who might be indirectly affected (pupils, staff and parents)

This section draws upon the experience of schools in order to address the issues faced by Headteachers and their colleagues. It offers guidance on:

- Immediate action by the school
- Action within hours of the incident
- Action to be taken as soon as possible.

When schools face a critical incident, research suggests that they cope best when they have clear procedures and know how to use support networks. Staff should be as fully prepared as possible before any such incident occurs.

### **Critical Incidents on Visits**

This document should be read in conjunction with the Local Authority's (LA) Guidelines for Critical Incidents Manual as an essential element of planning for any trip is the procedure for dealing with an emergency. In the event of an emergency the priorities are to assess the situation, safeguard uninjured, attend to the casualty and inform the emergency services and school.

The DFE's Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits provides an outline of issues to include when preparing a procedure for dealing with an emergency:

- Establish the nature and extent of the emergency
- Ensure the group are safe and looked after
- Establish names of casualties and secure medical attention; provide details and medical history
- Ensure all group members who need to know about the incident are informed
- Ensure that a staff member accompanies casualties to hospital
- Notify relevant people and services e.g. police, British Embassy / Consulate if abroad, school, parents, insurers, tour operators etc.
- Details passed on to the school should include nature, date and time of incident, location, names of casualties and details of injuries, action taken so far and by whom, action to be taken. Ascertain numbers for further telephone contact.
- As soon as possible after, record detail of what happened, witness details and preserve any evidence. Retain records of all events, times and contact after event, in the Incident Recording Log.
- Complete relevant Health and Safety Executive (HSE) report forms
- **No one** should speak with the media or discuss legal liability with other parties.

The above, and the following guidelines, are not meant to be prescriptive, or an attempt to cover all possible events, but to act as a model that can be adapted to deal with a number of different situations.

### **Immediate action**

- 1 Gather information
- 2 Assess continuing risk
- 3 Brief the support team
- 4 Contact appropriate agencies

### **Action within hours**

- 1 Contact the families of those involved
- 2 Telephone communication to and from school
- 3 Inform school staff
- 4 Inform pupils
- 5 Handling the media (if necessary)

### **Action as soon as possible**

- 1 Arrange debriefing for staff and pupils involved in the incident
- 2 Inform the wider community
- 3 Identify any inappropriate content of the school curriculum
- 4 Develop a plan for handling the feelings and reactions of others
- 5 Release a more detailed press statement (if necessary)

### **Support available to schools**

- 1 Telephone contact for advice and support
- 2 Debriefing and planning with staff
- 3 Debriefing sessions for pupils

### **Managing trauma**

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Providing opportunities to talk through or otherwise express personal reactions
- 3 Continuing or quickly re-establishing normal routines
- 4 Formal and informal recognition and rituals
- 5 Return to school by pupils or staff

### **Section A: Immediate action**

Take the following action **immediately** after a critical incident.

#### **A1 Gather information**

It is important to collect as much information as possible about the incident. You should include:

- What happened
- Where and when the incident took place
- Whether there is still a continuing danger
- If the incident happened off-site, what help is required from the school
- The numbers and names of those injured and the extent of their injuries
- The current location of those injured, and the name and contact number of an adult present
- The location of children who were involved but not injured, plus the name and contact number of an adult present
- The name and contact number of an adult at the incident site (if off-site).

#### **A2 Assess continuing risk**

- Is it likely that further injuries or damage may occur?
- If there is a continuing risk, the first priority must be to safeguard the welfare of the children, staff and visitors.
- Contact the appropriate emergency services.
- Ensure that any immediate action to protect people or property does not give rise to further risk.

### **A3 Brief the support team**

This will be a predetermined group, although additional members may be needed when the incident involves a particular group in the school. The Head Teacher has responsibility for what happens in the school, and is therefore responsible for the actions of the support team. However, they may choose to delegate the leading of this team to a pre-arranged member of staff. The team will not necessarily comprise the senior management team in the school, but might usefully involve representatives of the wider school community, such as the office staff and caretaker.

The purpose of the briefing is to share information gathered about the incident and allocate responsibility for immediate and short-term tasks, as suggested in this policy. The head-teacher should call a meeting of this team at least annually to update names, contact numbers, checklists and procedures.

### **A4 Contact appropriate agencies**

In all circumstances, contact the Director of Children's Services immediately to initiate LA support and to obtain advice on who else to contact. You should also inform the Chair of Governors. The Educational Psychology Service and the Education Social Work Service can also offer assistance. ***See Section F4 for contact numbers.***

## **Section B: Action within hours**

This section details action to take within the first few hours after an incident.

### **B1 Contact the families of those involved**

The school maintains an up-to-date list of emergency contacts for children and staff, and ensures it has an effective procedure for knowing who is on site. In the event of serious injury or death, the police will be involved and are likely to take responsibility for informing relatives in person. However, it may be helpful for them to be accompanied by a member of staff.

In other circumstances, contacting the families of those involved should be done quickly and sensitively by the school. If the contact person cannot be reached by telephone, leave a brief message asking them to telephone a particular number. Try to avoid leaving complex messages as these can become distorted when conveyed.

When releasing information to a wider audience, e.g. parents, prepare the information with care. Give the appropriate facts and express sympathy or concern. Blame and liability should not be attributed. Remember that the media are likely to get access to this statement.

### **B2 Telephone communication to and from school**

When the news of an incident reaches the community, a large number of people will want to contact the school for details. This could jam the main telephone line, making it difficult for outside calls to be made and for others to get through.

If possible, dedicate a particular line to outgoing calls. Callers phoning the usual school line should be given a factual statement and reassurance that action is being taken to manage the situation. If further details are requested, ask the caller to leave a name and number on which they can be contacted. Be courteous but concise to keep the line free for other callers. Parents will need to know whether to come to the scene of the incident, or whether their child will be returned to school or home.

The Director of Children's Services may be able to provide guidance or contact appropriate agencies, such as the School Health Service and Social Services, on the School's behalf.

### **B3 Inform school staff**

Provide staff with the factual details of the incident so that they can feel confident when handling questions and issues. Tell them when this information will be updated. Encourage staff to refer enquiries to the support team when in doubt. Ask them not to talk to the media unless advised to do so by the Director of Children's Services or the press office. This minimises the risk of mixed messages and misinformation.

### **B4 Inform pupils**

Tell pupils what has happened and allow them to ask questions. Decide whether it is better to talk to large groups, small groups or individuals. This process is often best managed in small groups, by a member of staff who is well known to the pupils and confident in handling their reactions.

### **B5 Handling the media**

Communications with the media should be handled through the Director of Children's Services and the press office. (See **Section F4** for contact numbers). The Head Teacher should concentrate on the welfare of the school community and let officers deal with press interest, which can be intrusive. There are instances when the Head Teacher is the most appropriate spokesperson but this can be agreed on an individual basis with the press office.

It may be necessary to control access points to the school site, allowing parents in but not the press. Remember, you are entitled to say who can enter the school and who cannot. Members of the press should not enter without permission. If necessary, schools should ensure that all official calls have been made before allowing pupils to ring home.

## **Section C: Action as soon as possible**

The school should take the following action as soon as possible after a critical incident.

### **C1 Arrange debriefing for staff and pupils involved in the incident**

The nature of debriefing sessions will depend on the incident. You might find it helpful to consider a different process for:

- Casualties
- Witnesses
- The wider community

Also bear in mind:

- Whether separate briefings might prevent the incident from escalating
- The differing needs of children of various ages and at different stages of development
- Whether all parties need to know all the facts, thereby exposing everyone to the same levels of stress
- The closeness of individuals to the incident
- Whether there is good reason to respect the confidentiality of someone involved

## **C2 Inform the wider community**

It may be helpful to contact neighboring schools, especially where siblings are at other schools.

## **C3 Identify any inappropriate content of the school curriculum**

Pupils who have recently been traumatised are especially sensitive to reminders. Children's literature, assembly stories and episodes in history all provide sources of likely triggers. Do not avoid such references altogether, but anticipate likely reactions and ensure teachers feel able to manage them.

## **C4 Develop a plan for handling the feelings and reactions of others**

Be alert to possible staff reactions, even among those who are not directly involved but for whom the incident triggers difficult emotions. Outside agencies can offer support and advice to staff. *See Section F4 for contact numbers.*

## **C5 Release a more detailed press statement**

At this stage a press statement could include not only details of what happened but the action taken by the school and other agencies to manage the situation. As before, the press office can be a useful channel as well as source of advice on what to say. Involving the press office at an early stage can help avoid pitfalls.

## **Section D: Support available to schools**

Schools facing a major critical incident will invariably galvanise the resources of their community - teachers, non-teaching staff, governors, parents, and other agencies - to support each other through the difficulties. In some circumstances schools will need extra help to provide emotional support, debriefing and counseling from the Education Department, other sections of the Local Authority (e.g. Social Services) or from external agencies (e.g. health trusts or religious organisations). It is essential that the school seeks, commissions and manages any such external support offered.

In the aftermath of a major incident, especially one attracting media attention, schools can be inundated with offers of help from voluntary groups and individuals. You need to select and manage such offers carefully to meet the best interests of pupils and staff. It is clear that anticipation of a critical incident, through basic planning and staff training, will be invaluable if such an event occurs.

The Local Authority can make available three specific types of support to schools in the first days and weeks after a critical incident (in addition to technical and practical services).

### **D1 Telephone contact for advice and support**

Most schools will have some strong personal links with the Local Authority, for instance through the Director of Children's Services, Educational Psychology, Education Social Work Service and Education Personnel Services. Such contacts can be useful, particularly for Headteachers, in providing specific information, moral support, advice and a trusted sounding board at a difficult time. Officers are used to providing support and expect to respond to such emergencies.

### **D2 Debriefing and planning with staff**

School staff, especially class teachers, may feel responsible for supporting the pupil or class during a period of crisis. However, they also have to deal with their own emotions. A new loss may evoke memories of a previous one. Grief or other reactions may return for a

while.

In addition, there are several reactions connected with being a professional person having responsibility for the support of children and young people. Feelings of helplessness and inadequacy in the face of others' grief and pain are not uncommon. Shock, embarrassment, guilt and a wish to push down the emotions are all natural reactions at such times. It is important that staff members have support networks readily available and feel able to ask for help. Senior staff and governors need to be aware that these reactions may occur and should seek appropriate guidance from outside agencies.

It may be helpful for teachers to discuss the difficulties they may face collectively. Schools should endeavour to maintain as normal an atmosphere as possible, therefore providing a stable environment which will help children and younger people cope with any stress arising from their personal circumstances.

It is also important to remember that school staff, including teachers and teaching assistants are not trained counselors. They are not expected to offer bereavement counseling. Listening and being available for comfort are the main skills required. However, if a member of staff feels unable to offer support because of their own reactions, this should be acknowledged and accepted, and another colleague should be considered for the role.

Specialist support can be provided to help a group of staff come to terms with a critical incident and to plan their responses to pupils, colleagues and parents. This might, in a small school, be a structured half day to talk over individual reactions and concerns with all staff.

Some follow-up support could be agreed for the whole group or part of it. Where, over a few weeks, it is clear that individual staff may need more substantial support or counseling, the Local Authority can help with referral to appropriate agencies.

### **D3 Debriefing sessions for pupils**

Evidence suggests that when pupils are directly involved as witnesses to a traumatic incident they benefit from structured debriefing sessions. Debriefing can also benefit pupils on the periphery of an incident. This enables them to express what they saw or heard, how it affected them and how they feel about it in retrospect.

Schools can often handle this process themselves. For more demanding and emotive situations, however, specialist support is valuable. The Education Department's educational psychologists can provide this support. Specialist help needs careful planning and is likely to be given between one and four weeks after the incident. It is essential to get parental consent to children's involvement.

## **Section E: Managing trauma**

### **E1: Introduction**

The management of a critical incident can result in a great deal of stress for those involved. It is therefore important to:

- Acknowledge the emotional state of staff and children and allow time and space when needed

- Acknowledge that some staff may not wish to or be able to be directly involved in supporting children
- Be aware that the burden of support may fall disproportionately on a small number of staff
- Acknowledge that the incident may act as a trigger to children who are emotionally vulnerable, even if they are not directly involved. This may result in difficulties in behaviour and relationships
- Be sensitive to the effects on staff or children's concentration and performance
- Be sensitive to the effect on home and social life for families and peers.

## **E2: Providing opportunities to talk through or otherwise express personal reactions**

While attempting to ensure continuity and normality, staff should encourage children to talk about their feelings and be prepared to listen to them. It is often difficult for children to make sense of, and talk about, what has happened because of their limited thinking and communication skills. It is therefore helpful if familiar adults are particularly alert to the signals which show that the children are still working through what has happened.

Some children may require support which cannot be provided in a class or small group. Short-term counseling should be offered by appropriately trained and supported staff, possibly outside the normal timetable.

Groups of children may be offered support from outside professionals who can debrief them, to help them understand their reactions and develop coping strategies. Parental permission should be sought in this instance. Staff closely associated with the children involved should be offered opportunities for debriefing and counseling. Be aware of the possible delayed reactions of those actively involved in responding to a critical incident. Staff co-coordinating the school's response should be supported and scheduled for relief periods.

Some children and staff may need therapeutic help for a considerable time, or at some time after the event.

## **E3: Continuing or quickly re-establishing normal routines**

Every attempt should be made to provide as much continuity as possible for children. Maintain the normal school day so that children are unsettled as little as possible.

## **E4: Formal and informal recognition and rituals**

Arrangements may be made to express sympathy to the families directly affected by the incident.

Injured children can be visited in hospital.

Children can be encouraged to send cards and letters.

Plan to attend a funeral, if welcomed by the family involved.

Discuss the desirability of holding special assemblies and memorial services.

Anniversaries are key times and the school should ensure such times are planned for and

handled with sensitivity.

### **E5 Return to school by pupils or staff**

Pupils and staff who were injured or distressed as a direct result of the incident will need significant support to reintegrate back into school life. Remember to provide help to others returning to school after an absence, for example:

- Staff and pupils on sick leave at the time of the incident
- Anyone who missed the debriefing sessions
- Those who were not at school on the day of the incident and who learned of events afterwards.

## **F Organisations offering support to schools**

### **F1 Educational Psychology Service**

The aim of intervention by the Educational Psychology Service is to help all those involved in a critical and traumatic incident to understand and cope with its aftermath. Our starting point is to help identify and acknowledge existing expertise/experience and to assist those concerned to build upon this at a stressful time.

The Service therefore sets out to be available to help monitor and assist in meeting the psychological needs of pupils and staff in a manner which compliments, rather than replaces, the skills of others. A range of psychological skills are brought to this process as we listen, examine, plan and provide support. It is important to remember that no two incidents will be the same and that all children, and adults, will deal with these incidents in individual and unique ways. Our response, therefore, needs to be flexible.

The role of the Educational Psychologist can be seen at different levels – they can be involved in helping schools in preparation for any form of loss or bereavement, and they can be there to provide support on occasions where a reactive approach is required.

The Educational Psychology Service can provide support to school staff after a critical incident in a number of ways by:

- Working with staff groups to plan how to respond to individual and group needs (possibly via the curriculum, including grief reactions and support systems across different cultures.)
- Helping the school implement the guidelines in this document
- Providing information about typical reactions to traumatic events
- Providing advice on ways to support individual pupils

All types of support are negotiated between staff and the educational psychologist concerned. The Educational Psychology Service will be undertaking specific training in this area in order to provide support to schools. The Educational Psychology Service can be reached on 020 8825 5050

### **F2 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)**

CAMHS is made up of qualified staff in the field of child and adolescent mental health, including child psychiatry, clinical psychology, social work, psychiatric nursing, art therapy,

family therapy and child psychotherapy. They provide a service to children and young people with emotional, behavioural and developmental difficulties. Involvement may arise from concerns which could include eating problems, school refusal, unresolved grief, chronic illness or when there are relationship difficulties in the family. All of these issues may arise following bereavement.

CAMHS can contribute in helping schools develop a contingency plan that can help them in the event of an emergency, and support schools in dealing with a critical incident when it occurs. CAMHS can also work with children and young people who have been involved in a critical incident offering individual therapeutic help as well as consultation and advice to parents and schools.

### **F3 Educational Social Worker Service**

The Education Social Work Service can also offer advice and support when there are difficulties which have an impact on a pupil's school attendance. In situations where these may be linked to a critical or traumatic incident, an Education Social Worker may be able to provide direct support, or assist in making a referral to those who may be better placed to help. The Education Social Worker can also work with other Services such as the Educational Psychology Service in providing appropriate advice and support. The Educational Social Work Service can be contacted either by schools or directly by parents. The Service operates a daily duty system (9.00 am to 5.00 pm) and can be contacted by telephone on 020 8825 5000. This system also operates during school holiday times.

Other agencies can also be contacted for advice and support. These might include:

- Ethnic Minority Achievement Service
- Social Services
- Human Resources Service
- Achievement and Inclusion Service
- Religious Organisations
- Voluntary Organisations

## **G Temporary School Closure**

### **Introduction**

Statutory Instrument number 3181, The Education (School Day and School Year) Regulations 1999 in exercise of powers conferred by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, requires schools to open for a minimum of 380 sessions a year. This is subject to the proviso where "it is not reasonably practicable for arrangements to be made for it to meet at an alternative time to these sessions, the school shall be treated for the purposes hereof as if it had met as intended".

### **Readiness for All Emergencies**

- Key school staff are identified who are prepared to assume emergency roles and assist in leading the response to an incident
- Up-to date lists of contact telephone numbers and addresses are held centrally both in an electronic and hard copy format

- The Headteacher and members of the Leadership Team have at home a copy of the most up-to date version of the school emergency management plan and contact details of staff in case of emergencies out of school hours
- The Head Teacher and senior leaders will, when a significant incident occurs outside school hours which requires urgent action, request assistance in the first instance. This action will ensure that an approved contractor is alerted immediately.

### **If the closure is foreseen**

The Head Teacher will carry out a careful assessment of the need to shut part or all of the premises, evaluating

- The nature of the difficulties
- The anticipated length of the closure
- The ability to operate in part of the premises, including organisational and timetabling constraints of part-time attendance with partial access to the premises / facilities / accommodation and access for pupils with disabilities
- Work arrangements when no part of the premises can be used

The Headteacher will consult with and seek agreement from, the Chair of Governors, and one of the Assistant Directors. Agreement should be confirmed in writing at the earliest opportunity.

### **Emergency closure**

Where the closure is unavoidable and of an emergency nature e.g. gas leak or unexpected and unforeseen major building problems of a severe nature, the Headteacher, or deputy Headteacher, will take immediate steps to secure the safety of pupils and staff and to contact relevant emergency services.

The school will implement its emergency closure procedure

At the earliest opportunity the Chair of Governors and one of the Assistant Directors (or other listed emergency contact) will be informed of the action taken.

Information will be sent to parents explaining the circumstances and the reason for the decision

The school will take account of the specific needs of vulnerable children on roll and / or their families. The school will maintain contact during the closure with the relevant officers in the child protection and referral and assessment services

If the school site remains unsafe and the closure is anticipated to be for longer than one day, staff will be advised of arrangements or another suitable venue so that they can prepare work for pupils.

### **Communication with Parents by the Head Teacher**

Before the school is closed the Headteacher will consider the most suitable method of informing parents / carers. We will not send pupils home before contacting parents / carers to advise them of the closure. Staff will be available to speak with parents in the playground if appropriate.

The Headteacher will consider what alternative arrangements need to be made for pupils whose parents cannot be contacted.

- A notice will be placed on the external gates of the school, but this will only be part of the mechanism for contacting parents and not the only source of information.
- The Head Teacher will prepare a letter to parents / carers at the earliest opportunity giving information on the reasons for the closure and its anticipated length. The letter will explain that the closure has been discussed with and agreed by the Chair of Governors and Local Authority. Letters will be cleared by an Assistant Director to ensure that information is accurate before it is sent out.
- The Head Teacher will make appropriate arrangements to contact other service providers i.e. school catering company and all staff including part-time, of the reasons for the closure, any interim arrangements in place and details of re-opening.
- Parents and other service providers will be given a contact point to provide information during the school closure and to give details of the arrangements for re-opening. To communicate with parents and staff in the event of a school closure, we use:
  - Text messaging service
  - The school website
  - Parent Hotline Telephone Service

Any information about the school closure recorded on the above media will be updated regularly to take account of changing circumstances.

The school will direct any press or media enquiries to the Communication Unit at Percival House on 020 8825 6357.

## **TEMPORARY SCHOOL CLOSURE – ACTION CHECKLIST FOR HEAD TEACHER**

### **Immediate action**

- Assess situation and level of risk
- Ensure safety of pupils and staff
- Contact emergency services if appropriate

### **Action in the first hour**

- Contact the Chair of Governors
- Contact an Assistant Director
- Inform staff and pupils
- Contact the families of those involved
- Contact providers of services to school
- Identify all key contact numbers for ongoing communication

### **Action in first few hours**

- Draft letter to parents / carers and clear it with Assistant Director
- Post information on school website, School Open Check,
- Refer any press or media enquiries to the Council's Communications Unit
- Liaise with Assistant Directors to identify temporary relocation venue for staff

### **Further action**

- Ensure website and answer phone information are updated regularly as the situation changes / improves
- Review and update earlier action as necessary

### **When all is returned to normal**

- Prepare letter to parents
- Prepare report to staff, governors, LA

### **H Contact numbers**

Perceval House		020 8825 5000
Acting Headteacher	Leonie Lobo	020 8578 1654
Assistant Headteacher	Parmjeet Dhami	020 8578 1654
Assistant Headteacher	Karen Harrison	020 8578 1654
Assistant Headteacher	Clare Chipperton	020 8578 1654
School Business Manager	Jeff Mays	020 8578 1654
Chair of Governors	Pastor David Wise	020 8575 3983
Director Children's Service	Judith Finlay	020 8825 5177
Assistant Director	Julie Lewis	020 8825 6473
Press Office	Maria Mercer	020 8825 6357
Educational Psychologist	Sam Caswell	020 8825 5050
Education Social Worker	Lucinda Poole	020 8825 5040
Child Protection	Tom Galvin	020 8825 5501
Police		999
Fire Brigade		999
Hospital	Ealing	020 8967 5000