

## CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES

### Rationale

Whittlesea Secondary College (WSC) has a duty of care to the students, staff, families and wider community in the event of traumatic events.

This Policy and plan are part of the Whittlesea Secondary College Emergency Management Plan.

### Aims

- to mobilise all support services in a timely manner to support all members of the community affected by trauma.
- to provide clear, accurate information at all times.

### Implementation

#### Definition

- A Critical Incident is a traumatic crisis which directly involves the school and which has resulted in loss of life or serious injury and/or emotional trauma within the school community.

#### Child Safety

- As a result of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Victorian Government introduced a range of measures to better protect children. These measures include:
  - The Child Safe Standards
  - Reportable Conduct Scheme
  - Organisational Duty of Care
- Whittlesea Secondary College (WSC) uphold our Statement of Commitment to Child Safety (refer to the WSC Child Safe Environment Policy, Appendix A).
- All staff, volunteers, contractors, and any other member of the school community involved in child-related work will be informed about, and expected to adhere to, the Whittlesea Secondary College Child Safety Code of Conduct (refer to the WSC Child Safe Environment Policy, Appendix B).
- The Child Safety Code of Conduct applies in all school situations, including school camps and in the use of digital technology and social media.

#### Framework to Guide Actions

These guidelines provide a framework for action and would not necessarily be followed in all cases however emphasise the four key principles:

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

The response will vary depending on the complexity of the incident, and the proximity to members of the community.

#### 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.
- 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.

### **Actions Framework**

This provides a framework for actions to be taken as a result of a tragic/traumatic event which involves the school. The Critical Incident Recovery Plan (CIRP) provided in Appendix A, provides guidance for coordination and procedural actions.

The Critical or Traumatic Incident Plan – First 24 hour Short Term Tasks in Appendix B provides details for short term procedural actions.

The Emergency Message Record Form – Template in Appendix C provides a procedural template to record Critical Incidents and Actions.

Four principles frame our actions

Incidents vary in complexity therefore these guidelines provide a framework for action and would not necessarily be followed in all cases. However, the following four 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.

### **Take Action**

- Appoint a skilled Critical Incident Recovery Team to assist in the management of the incident. The team may include staff members, psychologists, counsellors, external Department of Education and Training (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 to the [DET Emergency Management and Securities Support Services](#) on 9589 6266, which operates a 24/7 communication centre and utilises an Incident Reporting Information System (IRIS) to enable schools to meet their mandatory reporting responsibilities in an emergency, or during a crisis.
- 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 [DET Relationship with the Media](#) on 9637 2871
- 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 situations that are more complex it may mean maintaining telephone contact at the school.
- Try to identify those most likely to need help, e.g. classmates, teacher, special friends. Some students not directly affected may become distressed.
- Continue contact with the family to identify their expectations of the school, e.g. student participation in funeral or memorial service.
- 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 [DET Emergency Management and Securities Support Services](#) on 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.

#### Counselling

- 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.

#### **Post Event Actions**

- 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.
  - Be aware 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.

#### **Related Legislation and Policies**

- [Ministerial Order No. 870](#)
- [DET Child Safety Policy](#)
- [DET Emergency Management Planning](#)
- [DET Managing School Emergencies - Minimising the impact of trauma on staff and students](#)
- [DET Records and Information Management](#)
- WSC Child Safe Environment Policy
- WSC Emergency Management Plan
- WSC Accidents and Incidents Policy
- WSC Duty of Care Policy
- WSC Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Inclusion Policy

#### **Appendices**

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

**Evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's three-year review cycle.

**This Policy was last ratified by School Council in: 2017**

## APPENDIX A

### Critical Incident Recovery Plan (CIRP)

#### 1. PLAN STATEMENT

This Plan is an integral part of the Emergency Management processes of the school.

#### 2. IMPLEMENTATION

The Recovery Team will be responsible for coordinating and implementing the Plan (refer to 4.3 for the composition of the team).

It will need to consider:

- establishing the facts as soon as possible
- developing an action plan of short, medium and long term tasks
- contact with the Department of Education and Training (DET)
- liaising with external bodies including the media
- communicating with the whole staff as soon as possible
- meeting with staff both as a whole and with individuals or groups for debriefing
- communicating with the student body
- meeting with students in groups or individually for debriefing
- contacting parents/guardians
- short term and long term counselling requirements for groups or individuals

The relevance of each of the above will depend on factors such as the nature and magnitude of the incident, the intensity of the impact on the School community and the number of people affected.

#### 3. DEBRIEFING

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing has three components:

1. Initial discussion about feelings and an assessment of the intensity of the stress responses
2. Detailed discussion of signs and symptoms of stress responses
3. Closing stage - provides overview and information with referral to an outside agency if required
  - 3.1 The Recovery Team will assist the Principal to facilitate the recovery of staff and students and those of the School community affected by the critical incident.

3.2.1 The debriefing meeting of the Recovery Team should include a mental health professional and one peer who were not involved in the incident.

3.2.2 The Recovery Team will decide the structure and composition of debriefing meetings; such meetings should be held within eight hours of the critical incident. These meetings will review the impressions and reactions of the persons involved during or following the incident.

3.3 Counselling support and referrals for students and their families will be provided initially by the Principal or their nominee and/or the Network Emergency Management Co-ordinator.

#### 4. REVIEW

4.1 The Recovery Team will meet to review the implementation of the Critical Incident Recovery Plan within seventy two (72) hours of the critical incident.

4.2 As part of the Critical Incident Recovery Plan, the Principal will set up a Recovery Team at the beginning of each year, composed with the following personnel.

Principal	
Leading Teacher	
Teacher	
Business Manager	

4.3 Following a critical incident, the Principal will convene the Recovery Team as soon as possible.

The composition of the Recovery Team will be:

- the Principal
- Leading Teacher
- a member of the teaching staff (first aid trained)
- a member of the Educational Support staff
- Network Emergency Management co-ordinator
- other support staff as appropriate
- as necessary, psychologists, counsellors and DET personnel.

4.4 The Principal will convene the Recovery Team once each semester to review planning and strategies for the Critical Incident Recovery Plan.

## APPENDIX B

### Critical Incident Recovery Plan (CIRP) - First 24 hour Short Term Tasks

#### Responsibilities and Procedures

##### 1. Emergency Record Form

Record Information using the Emergency Record Form in Appendix C, including the

- nature of the incident
- location of the incident, number and names of persons involved
- name of the person reporting the incident
- time incident reported
- contact telephone number if away from school.

Verify all Details

- confirm that the information given about the event is accurate

Record the Incident

- notify principal workplace coordinator
- ensure emergency services have been called notify the [DET Emergency Management and Securities Support Services](#) on 9589 6266 (Principal and/or Business Manager responsibility)
- call the Whittlesea Secondary College Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Manager

##### 2. Ensure students and staff are safe from harm or injury

- class teachers cordon off any 'crisis' area and keep students away from there
- manage the grounds while staff are briefed and ensure media do not intrude
- check corridors, toilets etc. for stray students - try to prevent students leaving on their own particularly if distressed
- send all very stressed students to the Recovery area in the staffroom
- ensure that students do not make hysterical calls out of school
- ensure the school continues as normally as possible

##### 3. Establish Critical Incident Recovery Team

The composition of the Recovery Team will be

- the Principal
- the Leading Teacher (determined by the trauma)
- a member of the teaching staff (first aid trained)
- a member of the Educational Support staff (first aid trained)
- other support staff as appropriate
- Whittlesea Secondary College Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Manager
- as necessary, psychologists, counsellors and DET personnel.

##### 4. Allocate responsibilities

- emergency message register
- emergency contact list
- evacuation and assembly of staff and students
- cordon off area of 'crisis'
- establish a Support Team and Communications Centre comprising the Principal team, Wellbeing and OH&S Manager to:
  - manage information and phone calls

- coordinate media requests for information
- provide information to parents arriving at school
- coordinate routine school activities – maintain where practical
- notify students, staff and ancillary about the emergency
- notify parents first, and then siblings in the school
- establish a recovery room and supervisor for affected students
- establish a waiting room for parents
- inform students
- inform School Council
- inform School Community by newsletter or SMS (short text message)
- monitor School Community's reactions
- liaise with outside agencies and emergency services
- brief key personnel and review responses

#### **4.1 Recovery Room**

Set Up Recovery Room with resources such as:

- the staffroom
- empty adjoining rooms if possible and relocate to other rooms
- screen windows
- have available pens, felt tip pens, paper, scissors, envelopes, tissues

Appoint Recovery Room Supervisors including as necessary,

- first Aid trained staff
- teachers (for supervision Duty of Care responsibilities)
- ES staff

Recovery Room Supervisors' Responsibilities

- keep calm
- monitor students for shock reactions, provide first aid if necessary
- encourage students to gather in small friendship groups rather than bigger ones
- keep a list of students attending the recovery room
- give the students a task to undertake such as making a card or writing a letter
- contact parents of students who remain in the recovery room and alert them to possible concerns.

#### **5. Informing Staff**

- provide teachers and ancillary staff with a brief outline of the incident
- restate to ensure that staff understand and it sinks in
- outline recovery management arrangements
- discuss procedures to be followed by staff during the day
- discuss the general procedures that Critical Incident Team will be following
- discuss guidelines for informing students and ways of answering questions from them
- give staff time to discuss this among themselves
- provide a brief factual outline to others in the 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 the school holidays
- inform staff as soon as possible about arrangements for holding a brief meeting before informing students at the start of the next school day
- review with staff afterwards any issues and needs
- provide staff with contact numbers for counselling or support services for themselves
  - the [DET Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#) with OPTUM on 1300 361 008.

#### **6. Informing Students**

**Principal or Senior Staff**

- contact the bereaved family or police to ascertain what information may be released within the school
- prepare a written factual 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 on 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 who may be too distraught to take classes and arrange replacements
- inform students soon after briefing staff
- ask teachers to mark a roll to identify who has been informed and who has not.

### **Teachers**

- provide a factual account of the incident at the beginning of the first class in a way that ensures all students hears the same information
- limit speculation and rumours
- inform students about arrangements of counselling and recovery rooms
- inform students about arrangements for services, and appropriate ways to express condolences
- outline the arrangements for the day.

### **Notifying close friends**

- notify close friends especially girlfriends and boyfriends prior to making an announcement to other students
- take these students aside when they arrive at school and inform them privately
- consider contacting their parents prior to the start of the day
- ensure individual attention is given to intimate friends who are likely to have special needs beyond those of other students.

## **7. Communication Centre**

Organise the following to be on hand:

- telephone - dedicated line in case of jamming by incoming calls
- telephone message if necessary
- message records
- phone lists
- rolls
- excursion list
- timetable
- maps
- computer and printer
- photocopier
- Emergency Management Plan.

## **8. Media Coverage**

- nominate a media co-ordinator, prepare the School Council President and Principal to provide on camera interviews
- contact DET Media Unit on 9637 2871 or 9264 5821
- prepare a three paragraph report:
  - briefly outline the facts
  - outline what the school has done to assist those affected
  - outline support and recovery arrangements
  - include a name and contact number for the school media co-ordinator
- liaise with the family about any statements made to media
- exclude discussion of policy matters, limit comment to the emergency and the school response

- set rules for persistent media
- keep a record of media enquiries
- offer scheduled interviews in return for media commitment not to seek uninvited access to staff, students, parents
- negotiate accepted areas for filming e.g. school/church boundary and not within and not in front of any school signs
- check that information provided does not conflict with court requirements or police proceedings
- anticipate renewed interest arising from anniversaries, court proceedings.

#### **9. Long Term Actions**

- monitor and support members of the school community, particularly on significant dates such as anniversaries
- consider longer term intervention activities such as counselling or specialist support
- consider establishing an area within the school as a place of remembrance
- reconvene key people at regular intervals to review the school response and effectiveness of planning arrangements
- review the school emergency management plan in light of experience gained
- consider a ritual of marking significant dates
- prepare for legal proceedings if necessary
- remove students name from the roll if deceased
- consider article in school magazine

#### **10. Reference**

- [DET Managing School Emergencies - Minimising the impact of trauma on staff and students](#)

## APPENDIX C

### Emergency Record Form

**This complies with**

<b>Name of School</b>		<b>Time – am/pm</b> Please indicate time at each step.
<b>Date of Notification</b>		
<b>Name of person taking the call</b>		
<b>Position</b>		
<b>Name of person reporting the incident</b>		
<b>Contact phone number</b>		
<b>Describe details:</b> Where is everyone now?  What action is being taken to help? Who? When? Where? How?		
<b>Nature &amp; extent of injury</b>		
<b>Immediate actions taken</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Principal contacted -</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Other school staff <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency services <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency & Security Management <input type="checkbox"/> Regional Operations contacted <input type="checkbox"/> Was an SMS message sent	
<b>Contact numbers:</b> POLICE 000 AMBULANCE 000 FIRE BRIGADE 000 <b>STATE EMERGENCY SERVICES (SES) 132 500</b> <b>LOCAL HOSPITAL</b> Northern Hospital: 8405 8000 <b>REGIONAL OPERATIONS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT:</b> John Brownstein 54403148 0407 045 063 <b>EMERGENCY SECURITY MANAGEMENT</b> (03) 9589 6266		
<b>Other notes:</b>		
<b>Record submitted by:</b>		
<b>Signature</b>		