

Serious Incident Procedures

Checklists and Role Statements

Adopted: 2016

RESPONSE TO A SERIOUS INCIDENT

All members of the SIMT need to urgently meet in order to plan an appropriate response to the serious incident.

Responsibilities will be assigned to relevant staff members and it will determine the actions required and timelines for doing so. Immediate implementation of the plan must take place.

Refer to **Appendix A** for detailed response plan to serious incident.

ROLE OF PRINCIPAL – determine which is appropriate given the circumstances

- 1 Contact emergency Services (**Appendix D** contains some relevant phone numbers)
- 2 Assume role of Media Officer in liaison with CSO
- 3 Contact/Convene SIMT
- 4 Verify facts
- 5 Contact CSO (AD) and Maintain Contact (Send Reports)
- 6 Contact Immediate Family (news of death should not be given by phone)
- 7 Letter to parents

The initial letter to parents should be sent out as soon as practicable following the Critical Incident. The letter may incorporate the following:

- Statement of facts – with family permission
 - Explanations of levels of care offered to students
 - Notification of funeral arrangements – if appropriate and with family permission
 - Statement of sympathy and grief by school
 - Prayer
 - Encouragement that attendance and a return to normal routine are important as a way of establishing stability and security.
- 8 Liaise with family in regard to an appropriate statement to the media
 - 9 Brief staff and students that all requests from the media are directed to the Principal
 - 10 Prepare a media statement in conjunction with the CSO
 - 11 Prepare a phone response to the media in conjunction with the CSO
 - 12 Prepare a phone response to inquiries and offers of support

ORGANISATION COORDINATOR – (Usually) AP Dean of Studies

Ensures the school continues to function with a normal routine as much as possible. Much of this role involves communication to key personnel and facilitating change to normal routines. The aim is to create a balance whereby the school functions as normally as possible while still providing the support mechanisms required.

Generally students can be in one of three places.

1. Normal classes
2. The Prayer Reflection Area
3. Counselling Area

It is not advisable to allow students to gather in groups in the playground while lessons are on. The House Coordinators are released from class to supervise and support the students in the Counselling Area since this person best knows the students and their needs.

POSSIBLE TASKS

1. Make appropriate changes to timetables, bells and classrooms.
2. Arrange for Relief Staff to replace key personnel and required (i.e. Student or Studies Coordinators, traumatised teachers, ancillary staff, etc.). Relief Staff should be briefed if they are unaware of the Serious Incident.
3. Organize roster of supervision of Prayer/Reflection Area
4. Maintain normal routines as much as possible
5. Make changes to class rolls as required
6. Designate counselling/reflection areas for staff and students where necessary e.g. Library, SMC, Theatrette, Theatre

WELLFARE – (Usually) AP Dean of Students, Ministry Coordinator & School Counsellor

1. STAFF WELLBEING COORDINATOR

Following a Serious Incident in a school it is often the staff who are the most difficult to support and care for. Many teachers feel the need to continue to carry out their normal routine regardless of the emotional trauma they may be experiencing. This is of course reinforced at some level by the school's very real need to provide as much normality as possible. Some staff may feel that it is inappropriate to seek counselling support at school. It is important to keep staff updated with information but not to further traumatise them. Choice is important. Staff should be made aware of external counselling services and how these can be accessed.

As deemed appropriate, staff may be offered participation in a formal Debrief, conducted by an external facilitator. This should not be compulsory.

POSSIBLE TASKS:

1. Inform all staff (teaching and support staff) by phone or in person. Notify them first staff briefing. Tree phone groups re-assigned if necessary.
2. Prepare guidelines for Care Class with the House Coordinators.
3. Notify local schools if appropriate.
4. Explain to Care Class teachers that they will be replaced if they wish.
5. Monitor absenteeism list so that students absent can be informed appropriately
6. Organise for daily Debriefs after school for first three days
7. Organise venue and notes for Debrief and inform all staff
8. Encourage attendance by all staff
9. Provide information to staff about counselling services available to them
10. Contact external facilitator for formal Debrief (Approx. one hour)
11. Discuss with classroom teachers the need to deal with seating arrangements if this is an issue
12. Contact Counsellors for support – gauge time commitment
13. Notify Adolescent Services at local hospitals, where appropriate
14. Organise daily Debrief for Counsellors

2. STUDENT WELLBEING COORDINATOR – AP Dean of Students & Ministry Coordinator (usually)

It is helpful for the House Coordinators to prepare for staff an “AT RISK” list of students who may be more vulnerable following a Serious Incident. In the case of a death of a student the list would include students who have suffered recent loss, have experienced some form of depression or other psychological problems or who are unable to cope appropriately due to an intellectual or learning difficulty.

As the days progress the students who have sought counselling or are on the “AT RISK” list need to be carefully monitored. It may be helpful to have an ongoing “vulnerability list”. The parents of High Risk students need to be contacted with a recommendation for counselling from either the school counsellor or an external agency or private practitioner. The ongoing monitoring of these students is one of the most significant roles of the Serious Incident response. In the case of suicide there is very real evidence of a contagion effect.

If there are external Counsellors supporting the Serious Incident response, it is helpful to have a daily debrief meeting. This can serve a number of purposes:

1. To communicate concern over particular students
2. To case conference and problem solve some of these concerns
3. To reflect upon the school community’s ability to manage
4. To unload after what can be very demanding crisis interviewing

In the case of youth suicide the aftermath of counselling the survivors can be an enormous task both in its severity and longevity. Ongoing supervision, establishing boundaries and balancing work with other aspects of one’s life are paramount to the care of oneself.

POSSIBLE TASKS:

- 1 Prepare Care Group outline for announcement of the Serious Incident in conjunction with the Staff Wellbeing Coordinator. Where necessary involve an appropriate outside expert, e.g. legal issue
- 2 Prepare ‘Vulnerability map’ of possible ‘at risk’ students in consultation with House Coordinator and Care Group teachers
- 3 Consult with Ministry Coordinator over the preparation of a prayer/reflection
- 4 Organise a log to record names, e.g. Care Group Lists
- 5 Prepare Counselling Area
- 6 Organise for a House Coordinator to act as a liaison person in the Counselling Area
- 7 Ensure the names of all students being seen by a Counsellor are recorded
- 8 Phone contact to the parents of students most at risk

3. PARENT WELLBEING COORDINATOR

The school may wish to establish a special parent support group for those parents most closely affected by the incident. These parents they may be experiencing their own trauma through increased over protectiveness, anxiety and sleep disturbance. They may feel powerless in how to best support and understand their children's reactions.

In the long term the school needs to reflect upon the education needs of the general parent body. These may reflect some of the issues which surround the Serious Incident – Drug and Alcohol Education, Adolescent Safety, Adolescent Mental Health, Communication with your Adolescent. The school needs to explore presenters with the most expertise in the area. Often a Serious Incident in a school community creates renewed energy for Parent Education.

Possible Tasks:

- 1 Assess need
- 2 Ascertain school support and grief/trauma reactions
- 3 Return any general phone inquiries from parents
- 4 Provide comprehensive list of Community Support Services
- 5 Arrange visit with affected families by Support/Counsellor
- 6 Arrange Parent Support Evening with facilitator from Health Services or other external agencies if necessary
- 7 Consider need for Parent Education for all Parents

MINISTRY (General)

The Ministry Coordinator's role is one of support and religious guidance. The Prayer/Reflection area provides a place where students can quietly reflect upon their feelings. At times those students deeply affected by the Serious Incident will move from the Prayer Area to the Counselling Area. The Coordinator can make this room more conducive to respectful grieving by the use of appropriate music, candle, prayer. It is often where students will write their own prayers. Although there is a supervising adult and a record of attendance, the adult's role is not to counsel. Extremely distressed students should be directed to the counsellors of other supportive adults in the school.

The involvement of the students in the preparation of liturgies can be very therapeutic as it offers the young people a task, which is reflective, positive, useful and future focussed.

In the Case of a Death

Attendance at the funeral can also be a very confronting experience for students as it can signify an important step in their grieving process. It is helpful to prepare students for what to expect at the funeral as for some it may be their first experience of a funeral. The school should not make the funeral compulsory. Some students will find it comforting to write letters to the deceased, often with the unsaid things and the expressions of regret.

It is advisable to remember the anniversary of the young person's death and to conduct a liturgy of remembrance. In the case of youth suicide it is not advisable to have highly visible memorials. This can perpetuate the myth of bravery and be counter-productive to messages we give young people about suicide not being an option to life's difficulties.

POSSIBLE TASKS:

1. Liaise with Parish Priest/and or Bereavement Team
2. Liaise with family relating to their wishes
3. Establish appropriate environment for Prayer/Reflection Area in consultation with the Organisation Coordinator
4. Prepare prayers for staff and students
5. Prepare with the students and facilitate school liturgies
6. Liaise with the family in preparation for the funeral
7. Prepare a letter to go home to all parents about the funeral arrangements in consultation with the Principal
8. Liaise with the Student Wellbeing Coordinator about students who are to represent to school at the funeral service and parent permission
9. Brief students for what to expect at the funeral
10. Consider letters of farewell by the students at the funeral
11. Remember anniversaries
12. Organise time and closure ritual, avoid large assembly or visible memorial if Serious Incident involves suicide
13. Organise follow up – grief and loss speaker

MEDIA LIAISON PERSON (Principal) – Useful information for Support staff answering phones.

Media Management and response to phone inquiries in consultation with CSO

- 1 Have a one voice policy to all media requests. This would normally be the Principal.
- 2 Prepare answers to the following:
 - What happened?
 - Why did the incident occur?
 - What is the school doing about it?
 - How does the school feel about it?
- 3 Return all calls from the media
- 4 Some things to be avoided
 - Don't speculate
 - Don't ignore the media
 - Don't say 'no comment' or 'off the record'
 - Don't distort the facts to look good
 - Don't ramble
 - Don't release the names of any deaths unless the next of kin/parents give permission
- 5 Provide an instruction sheet by the phones in the main administration area. If it is a request from the media, determine the nature of the media inquiry, note the name of the journalist, phone number and organisation.
- 6 If it is someone offering support of some kind
 - Thank the caller for their concern
 - Take caller's name, phone number and what assistance they are offering
 - Let them know someone will get back to them as soon as possible

GUIDELINES FOR THE FIRST STAFF MEETING FOLLOWING A SERIOUS INCIDENT. ALL STAFF (TEACHING AND NON TEACHING) MUST ATTEND

- 1 Provide a clear, factual account of the Incident. Maintain confidentiality.
- 2 Inform procedures for the announcement of the Incident to the School Community.
 - Facts
 - Prayer
 - Procedures for the Day and Support Services
 - Encouragement to seek Counselling Support
 - Directions concerning contact with the Media
 - Importance of School attendance
- 3 Reassure staff that they will deal with students at their level of comfort. If anyone feels unable to take a Care Group they will be replaced.
- 4 Request that Staff refer any 'At Risk' students to the Student Wellbeing Coordinator. Students who do not feel comfortable seeing a counsellor should be encouraged to consider other supportive adults in the school who they feel they could talk to.
 - Students most 'At Risk' may be those who
 - Have experienced some loss in the recent past
 - Have experienced some emotional, psychological problems
 - Are learning disabled and need assistance in processing the Incident

In the case of a student or staff member's death consider those who

- Had a close relationship with the deceased
 - Had disagreements with the deceased
- 5 Explain to the teachers that adolescents often grieve longer and more intermittently than adults. It is not unusual to see them crying and then shortly after, laughing. At times these responses can be interpreted as being manipulative.

GUIDELINES FOR CARE CLASS TEACHERS

- 1 Am I comfortable in delivering the information to students concerning the Serious Incident?
- 2 If not, alert the House Coordinator so that other arrangements can be made.
- 3 Mark roll and record absentees. When absentees return to school make sure students are fully briefed by Care Class teacher/ House coordinator.
- 4 Follow instructions from House Coordinator regarding information to be given.
- 5 Do not make comment to the media or any other outside inquiries. All inquiries to be directed to the Principal
- 6 Some things to avoid:
 - Don't speculate
 - Don't distort the facts to look good
 - Don't ramble
- 7 Reassure students that all will return to a state of normality. Reassure students that support structures are in place. Students needing assistance may seek out an adult with whom they are comfortable.
- 8 Be sure to communicate concerns about students to House Coordinators
- 9 Be alert to students who have medical conditions as these may be heightened by trauma, e.g. Diabetics, asthmatics.
- 10 Keep informed of the daily routine
- 11 Be aware that professional assistance is available
- 12 Teachers need to be prepared to hear some unusual questions. Try to respond to them with warmth and understanding. Redirect discussions toward the notion of support. Model that the Incident is serious but try to maintain as much normal routine as possible.

For the people who oversee all of the varied responses to the Serious incident it is recommended that they seek professional support for themselves for the future. The support needs to be by someone who has some specialist expertise in this area.

REPORTING

A Serious Incident Report Form (**Appendix B**) is to be completed by the Principal (or delegate) within 24 hours of the incident.

The SIMT will organise debriefing to:

- i. Evaluate response procedures;
- ii. Establish recommendations for managing future serious incidents &
- iii. Identify professional development or training needs that may need to be addressed as a result of the incident.

A “Serious Incident Follow up” report must be completed by the Principal (or delegate) for every serious incident.

This report will include the following details:

- i. Date, time and nature of the incident
- ii. The chronological series of events, actions and communications
- iii. Names of staff/students involved
- iv. A Communication Log (**Appendix C**)
- v. Evaluation and recommendations as per the SIMT debriefing
- vi. A copy of the Serious Incident Report Form
- vii. Notes from any meetings of the SIMT during and after the incident
- viii. Copy of any documents produced as a result of the incident

In order for a comprehensive evaluation process to take place, feedback must be gathered from staff, students and members of the wider school community.

An evaluation report will be written by the Principal (or delegate) and made available to the School Executive and staff.

The final Serious Incident Report will include the evaluation report and recommended changes to the Serious Incident Policy.

Serious Incident Management – Step by Step

Immediate Action

- ☐ Serious Incident occurs
- ☐ Principal is notified
- ☐ Principal notifies Emergency Services & Director
- ☐ Principal assembles Serious Incident Management Team (SIMT)
- ☐ Principal prepares statement and phone tree enacted
- ☐ Nominate a SIMT to manage all incoming/outgoing calls
- ☐ Principal meets with staff (if in school time). Advise of incident and instruct not to talk to media
- ☐ Contact families of victims. Personal visit? Flowers/condolences?
- ☐ Advise students in groups and instruct not to talk to media (if in school time)
- ☐ Communicate with parents
- ☐ Arrange relief teaching and supervision of students if necessary

Additional Action within 24-72 hours (tick when actioned)

- ☐ Keep staff, students and families updated with new information
- ☐ Establish Support Structures within the School: Liturgy, Prayer Space, Counselling

Follow Up 72 Hours – 1 to 2 weeks (tick when actioned)

☐

Monitor reactions and provide support and opportunities for debriefing

☐

Keep a note of condolences

☐

Continue to arrange relief teachers as required

☐

Is a school memorial service necessary?

☐

Inform community of funeral arrangements and organise attendance

Post Crisis – Long term (tick when actioned)

☐

Has debriefing taken place? Arrange ongoing support as required

☐

Implement processes to monitor students once school resumes normal operations

☐

Monitoring and maintaining memorials

☐

Note any unexpected anniversaries (birthdays etc). What will be done to mark anniversaries?

☐

Be aware of any ongoing media attention. Ensure staff and students are supported and understand the process.

☐

Establish when SIMT will meet to evaluate the serious incident response

☐

Continue liaison with outside agencies

Serious Incident Report

Proforma to be completed and returned to Assistant Director within 24 hours of incident

Reporter's Name:

School:

Date of Report:

SUMMARY

Location of incident:

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Date and time of the Incident:

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Names and number of people involved:

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Details of the incident (events and causes):

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Principal's Name

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Principal's Signature

Communication Log

Appendix C

[illegible]

[illegible]

Serious Incident Contact List

SCHOOL EXECUTIVE CONTACTS		
Robert Emery	Principal	0249 571 032
Stephen Dunn	AP – Dean of Studies	0249 571 032
Carmel Wright	AP – Dean of Students	0249 571 032
Adam Frost	Ministry Coordinator	0249 571 032
Simone Kelly	Religious Studies Coordinator	0249 571 032
Frances Bowen	Office Manager	0249 571 032

DIAL 0 FOR AN OUTSIDE LINE	
EMERGENCY FIRE / POLICE/ AMBULANCE	000
STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE (SES)	132 500; 4931 3222
POLICE – Newcastle Station	4929 0999
AMBULANCE	131 233; 4921 7500
HOSPITAL – JOHN HUNTER	4921 3000
POISONS INFORMATION	131 126
INTERPRETING SERVICE	131 450; 4929 5100
WORK COVER	131 050
CSO Legal Advice: Nicola Arvidson	4979 1179
CSO Media Advice: Emma Blackford	4979 1316
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	4961 2611; 9377 6000
CATHOLICCARE	4979 1120
COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE	4924 6100
ST. VINCENT DE PAUL	(02) 9568 0262
SALVATION ARMY – CARE LINE FAMILY WELFARE	4929 2300

Other possible contacts	
Joshua Holliday (Theatre Manager)	0413 101 735
Tony Fraser (Groundsman)	0413 999 340
Dan Ryan (Groundsman)	0422 400 517