

Critical Incident Procedure & Policy



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact the Victorian School of Languages (03) 9474 0500.

RATIONALE

The Victorian School of Languages 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. This procedure should be read in conjunction with *Ministerial Order 1359 - Child Safe Standards* and the VSL's *Statement of Commitment to Child Safety*.

IMPLEMENTATION

Incidents vary in complexity. These guidelines provide a framework for action and would not necessarily be followed in all cases.

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.
- The Principal or their delegate 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. Liaise with the Senior Education Improvement Leader (SEIL) and Security Services Unit as required.
 - 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, teachers, 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 Services Unit on 1800 126 126.
 - 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 the opportunity for counselling services for all. Ensure that there are suitable places in which these can take place.
- The language 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.
- 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.
- Be sensitive to staff and students' needs over a period of time.

REFERENCES (including processes related to this policy)

Appendices which are connected with this policy are:

- Appendix A: Critical Incident Recovery Plan (CIRP)
- Appendix B: Critical or Traumatic Incident Plan – First 24 hour Short Term Tasks

COMMUNICATION

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Made available publicly on our school website – www.vsl.vic.edu.au
- Discussed at staff meetings/briefings as required
- Reference included in staff handbook
- Made available in hard copy from school administration upon request

POLICY REVIEW AND APPROVAL

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|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Policy last reviewed | November 2022 |
| Consultation | School Council: 22 March 2023 |
| Approved by | Principal |
| Next scheduled review date | May 2025 |

Critical Incident Recovery Plan (CIRP)

Responsibilities and Procedures

1. PLAN STATEMENT

This Plan is an integral part of the Emergency Management processes of the school. This is to be read in conjunction with the individual VSL Centre Emergency Management Plans.

2. IMPLEMENTATION

- a. The Recovery Team will be responsible for coordinating and implementing the Plan

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

3.1 Critical Incident Stress Debriefing has three components:

- a. initial discussion about feelings and an assessment of the intensity of the stress responses
- b. detailed discussion of signs and symptoms of stress responses
- c. closing stage - provides overview and information with referral to an outside agency if required

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 a Regional Guidance Officer.

3.4

4. REVIEW

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

- ii. As part of the Critical Incident Recovery Plan, the Principal will set up a Recovery Team at the beginning of each year.
- iii. Following a critical incident, the Principal will convene the Recovery Team as soon as possible.

The composition of the Recovery Team will be:

1. the Principal
2. the Assistant Principals
3. a member of the teaching staff
4. a member of the Educational Support staff (first aid trained)
5. other support staff as appropriate
6. as necessary, psychologists, counsellors and DET personnel

The Principal will convene the Recovery Team annually to review planning and strategies for the Critical Incident Recovery Plan.

Critical or Traumatic Incident Plan – First 24 hour Short Term Tasks

Responsibilities and Procedures

1. Emergency Record

Record Information

1. nature of the incident
2. location of the incident, number and names of persons involved
3. name of the person reporting the incident
4. time incident reported
5. contact telephone number if away from school

Verify all Details

6. confirm that the information given about the event is accurate

Record the Incident

7. notify principal workplace coordinator
8. ensure emergency services have been called notify the Department's 24 hour Emergency Communications Centre on **1800 126 126**

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

Area Managers and Administrative Staff:

- will cordon off any 'crisis' area and keep students away
- 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 designated Recovery area
- ensure that students understand the importance of not making 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 (or their delegate takes control)
- the Assistant Principals
- a member of the teaching staff /Child Safe Coordinator
- a member of the Educational Support /Centre Administrative staff (first aid trained)
- other support staff as appropriate
- as necessary, psychologists, counsellors and DET personnel

4. Allocate responsibilities

- emergency message register
- emergency contact list
- evacuation and assembly of staff and students
- scribe (where possible)
- cordon off area of 'crisis'

Establish a Support Team and Communications Centre to:

- manage information and phone calls
- coordinate media requests for information
- 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
- monitor School Community's reactions
- liaise with outside agencies and emergency services
- brief key personnel and review responses

a. Recovery Room(s)

Set Up Recovery Room

- Designate appropriate room/space
- empty adjoining rooms if possible and relocate to other rooms
- screen windows
- have available pens, textas, paper, scissors, envelopes, tissues

Appoint Recovery Room Supervisors

- First Aid 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

a. 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 student
- 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

b. **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
- maps
- computer and printer
- photocopier

c. **Media Coverage**

- nominate a media coordinator, 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 coordinator
- 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.
- negotiate accepted areas for filming e.g. school/church boundary and not within
- check that information provided does not conflict with court requirements or police proceedings
- anticipate renewed interest arising from anniversaries, court proceedings

d. 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

e. Emergency Contacts

- Refer to individual VSL Centre Emergency Management Plans

f. Reference

- <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/reporting-and-managing-school-incidents-including-emergencies/policy>