



Critical Incident Policy and Guidelines

St Mark's Coptic Orthodox College

1 Purpose

2 Scope

3 Critical Incidents

“Critical Incident” is any actual or alleged event or situation that creates a significant risk of substantial or serious harm to the physical or mental health, safety or well being of a member of the College.

This can include but is not limited to;

- the death or critical injury of a student, teacher, or prominent school community member.
- The destruction of the whole or part of the school (eg by fire).
- Break-in accompanied by major vandalism to a classroom or rooms.
- The murder of a student or teacher
- A group of students lost or injured on an excursion.
- Students and/ or teachers being taken hostage.
- Students witnessing serious injury or death.
- Unusual and unfavourable media attention.
- Allegations (which have become public knowledge) of sexual assault involving a member of the school community.
- A natural or other major disaster in the community.
- The terminal illness of a member of the school community.
- Death or critical injury of a school community member within the school environment.
- Legal action against the school.

A time period for critical intervention cannot be specified, but it is vital that initial intervention occurs quickly (within 1-3 hours and management within 1-3 days). Much pain can be alleviated by early identification of a critical incident. It is wise to avoid excessive deliberation. The situation itself may be extremely painful, but a well-managed process of intervention will significantly contribute to the process of recovery.

3.1 Cricos / ESOS Statutory Definition

Under Standard 6.8 of the *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018*, a critical incident is defined as *"a traumatic event, or the threat of such (within or outside Australia), which causes extreme stress, fear or injury."* This includes, but is not limited to, missing overseas students, severe verbal/psychological aggression, death or serious injury, natural disasters, or incidents involving domestic violence, sexual assault, or substance abuse affecting international students.

4 Critical Incident Action Plan

	Task	Time - Scale	Personnel Responsible
1	Obtain factual information at start of crisis	Within hours	Head of College to receive from person in charge / person(s) involved Head of College establishes a management team
2	Head of College and Executive Team meet with support personnel	Within hours	Management Team, College Counsellor and others as necessary

	to set brief of Management Team		
3	Establish an intervention team	Within hours	Management Team meets to determine members if intervention team
4	Contact families and chairperson of College Board	Within hours; continue until all affected are informed	Head of College, or representative or those appointed by the Head of College
5	Call a staff meeting (if appropriate) to give information or contact staff by email / telephone	Same day if practicable	Head of College or representative
6	1. Inform students 2. Inform school families	Same day if practicable	Head of College or representative
7	Arrange debriefing meeting for staff closely involved	Same day if practicable	Deputy Head of College and College Counsellor
8	Debriefing for students involved in incident	As soon as possible, allowing for health and safety	Deputy Head of College, House Patrons, College Counsellor and College Chaplain
9	Identify high risk students and staff	As soon as possible	All staff
10	Allow discussion in classes as appropriate	Following days and weeks	Class teachers and all other staff
11	Identify need for group or individual treatment, and organise treatment as necessary	Incremental over days or weeks after incident	Head of College and management team
12	Evaluation of action by management team	Within one month	Head of College and Executive team with assistance of facilitator
13	Concluding debriefing of staff and/or students	Following evaluation	Head of College, Executive Team and College Counsellor

5 The Major Tasks within a designated timeframe

5.1 Issues to look at within the first 24 hours

- Getting accurate facts
- Evaluating how critical the incident is

- Informing staff (logistics of this) – pyramid effect see appendix 1
- Informing parents (phone/SMS/email or personal visit)
- Informing students (When? Which groups? How much information?)
- Informing the Chairperson of the Board and a representative of the Trustees
- Arranging for sufficient number of counsellors to be at the school
- Counselling provisions (appropriate locations, setting up of drop-in room, need for outside counsellors)
- Media bulletins (if required) HEAD OF COLLEGE IS ONLY MEDIA SPOKESPERSON
- Initiation of special help for some students if required because of the nature of their disability
- Liaison with school insurers, school solicitors as required
- Liaise with the Youth Liaison officer Jody Bright
- **Mandatory Government Reporting (CRICOS/PRISMS):** Notify the Australian Department of Education and the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) via PRISMS (and/or the International Education Unit) if a critical incident involves an overseas student (especially in cases of death, critical illness/injury, missing student, or visa-impacting circumstances) as soon as practicable and no later than 14 days (or immediately in the event of student death, severe injury, or under-18 welfare changes).
- **Work Health and Safety (SafeWork NSW):** Immediately notify SafeWork NSW (Phone: 13 10 50) if the incident constitutes a "notifiable incident" under the *NSW WHS Act 2011* (i.e., death, serious injury/illness, or dangerous incident). Preserve the incident site until directed otherwise by SafeWork inspectors.
- **Child Protection & Mandatory Reporting:** If the incident involves child abuse, sexual assault, or reportable conduct involving a minor, immediately report the matter to the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) Child Protection Helpline (132 111) and/or the Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) in accordance with the College's Child Protection Policy and NSW statutory obligations.

5.2 Issues to look at within the next 2-3 days

- Restoring school routine while taking into account staff/ student needs
- Handling reactions (particularly extreme ones) in students, staff and/or parents
- Supporting the counsellors
- Provision of additional assistance if required

5.3 Issues to look at over the next month

- Possible arrangements for public expression (of farewell in the case of death, of thanks in the case of survival etc)
- Recognition of importance of closure ceremonies and activities
- Monitoring progress of any students, staff, or others (eg. bus driver) who have been hospitalised
- Alertness for delayed reactions
- Continuing to keep parents informed
- Possibility of burn-out in counselling staff
- Possibility of burn-out in Head of College and Executive team

5.4 Long term issues

- Flashback episodes can cause issue to be recalled very vividly (media highlights or a similar incident can stir vivid memories)
- Inquest or legal proceedings can be disturbing

- Anniversary phenomena may occur and lead to behaviour changes that are totally out of character

6 Procedures

6.1 Obtain Factual Information

It will be the responsibility of the Head of College and/or the Executive team to obtain the most accurate information possible through contact with police, family, staff and/or other outside agencies etc.

6.2 Head of College and Executive Meet with Support Personnel

The Head of College and executive will meet with the Counsellor (if there is one available) and selected teacher representatives to:

- Assess factual information and determine level of “seriousness”
- Establish an intervention team – decide who, how they will be contacted, where locate in the school etc.
- Decide on the nature of the school response and the timing for action;
- Set time and agenda for staff meeting and put into place measures by which all relevant people are notified;
- Nominate an executive member to be responsible for logistics-room, transport etc;
- Identify “at risk” students, staff and parents;
- Decide actions in relation to funeral, memorial service;
- Decide actions in respect to Media comment

6.3 Inform Staff

At a full staff meeting:

- Head of College to inform staff in writing prior to staff meeting, if circumstances permit
- The factual information is conveyed
- The plan for the school’s response is outlined;
- Roles for everyone are clarified;
- Staff are offered support

Important note: should the incident occur during school hours, and need an immediate response, the strategy will be for all students to go to their classrooms. The Executive team will monitor the classrooms to make sure all students have a member of staff with them. Everyone will remain in their areas while an Executive meeting takes place. Under these kinds of emergency circumstances, the main task would be to maintain calm and allow staff and students to receive information and be given an indication of what action to expect within the next 24 hours.

If an incident involves the evacuation of the school, the same procedures will apply as for fire drill and established evacuation procedures. These procedures will only be altered in the situation where a police officer or someone in a similar position of authority directs staff and students to do differently.

6.3 Inform Students

This will be done in class groups. At the initial meeting the students will be informed about the incident, the school’s actions and the counselling available.

“At risk” students will be siphoned off immediately by the Intervention team and given opportunity for counselling individually or in small groups. For the rest of the school things will continue as normally as possible but all students are informed that anyone feeling the need for counselling can join one of the counselling groups.

In the few days following an incident teachers are to allow discussion in class but if there are students who do not seem to have resolved the situation they should be passed on for individual counselling.

During the days immediately following an incident staff will also be rostered to intermingle with students and their parents at the pick up and drop off spots before and after school to reassure them and identify any particular problem situations.

Any staff member or students who wishes will be allowed to attend the funeral of a member of the school community providing the student’s parents agree. Encourage parents to attend with their children.

6.4 Provide Closure

There will be some formal act of closure taken depending on the nature of the incident – a memorial service, unveiling of plaque, planting of a tree, opening of a repaired section of the school etc.

6.5 Debrief Staff

A special staff meeting will be held to evaluate the school’s response.

6.6 Overseas Student Support Protocols

When a critical incident involves an overseas (CRICOS) student, the Head of College and Management Team will execute the following specific protocols:

- Overseas Parents / Legal Guardians: Immediately contact parents or legal guardians in the home country, ensuring age-appropriate and culturally sensitive communication.
- Translators / Interpreters: Arrange professional translation or interpreter services if language barriers exist.
- Travel, Insurance & Repatriation: Assist the family with emergency travel, accommodation, medical insurance claims, or repatriation arrangements in the event of death or severe illness.
- Consular Liaison: Contact the appropriate Embassy, High Commission, or Consulate of the student’s home country if required.
- Record Keeping: Complete and securely store a written record of the critical incident, all communication notes, and remedial actions taken. Maintain these records on file for at least two (2) years after the overseas student ceases to be an accepted student at the College.

7 Roles

It will be the responsibility of the first person on the scene at an accident or emergency to ensure the Ambulance or necessary emergency service is contacted.

For the duration of the incident/ post incident period specific roles are as follows:

7.1 Head of College

- Contact appropriate emergency service if this has not already occurred;
- Collect information
- Contact the school counsellor if not at the school on that day
- Advise chairman of the board and College Chaplin
- Advise parents of school in writing especially of student at risk – to express school's sympathy and support;
- Inform relevant priests.
- Call meeting of Executive and support personnel (ie critical incident management team members);
- Organise daily intervention team meetings, keep all relevant personnel informed;
- Liaise with the media, insurers, solicitors
- Keep accurate and factual notes and records of events

7.2 Executive Team

- Have an understanding of the Head of College's role in case the Head of College is involved in the incident or unavailable at the time of the incident
- Attend Executive and Intervention team meetings;
- Contact all members of staff in each area of the school (teaching and non- teaching) to ensure all are accounted for and are informed of the situation
- Staff are informed of the incident and of the general staff meetings;
- Inform all staff of any subsequent meetings.

7.3 Business Manager

- Attend Executive meetings;
- Co-ordinate response of the office staff where appropriate
- Liaise with insurers, solicitors

7.4 College Counsellor

- Attend Executive meetings;
- Co-ordinate Intervention Team;
- Organise outside counsellor/s for staff debriefing if needed;
- Organise counsellors with Centacare or ACCESS (when additional counselling support is needed). The nature of the accident may be such that the school may choose to invite in a specialist(s) after initial response action and longer term management strategies are decided.
- Organise and co-ordinate counselling for student, staff and school community if required

7.5 Critical Incident Management Committee

This committee is an ongoing standing committee consisting of the Head of College, one member of the executive, two teacher representatives and one member of the office staff.

- Assist executive in response to a critical incident as "Support Staff";
- Maintain the Critical Incident Plan;
- Annually review plan, updating information where necessary;
- Provide information and in-servicing as required;
- Familiarise new staff members with Critical Incident Plan procedures.

7.6 Teaching Staff

- Attend general staff meeting;
- Generally, ensure that the school continues to run smoothly;
- Work with students to maintain routines as much as possible;
- Support students and colleagues and help with the identification of individuals (students and staff) with specific needs.

7.7 Non-Teaching Staff

- Generally, ensure that the school continues to run smoothly
- Support teachers in management of students and the identification of individuals (staff and students) with specific needs;
- Provide back-up – comfort items, e.g. food, tissues, etc.

7.8 CRICOS / International Student Contact Officer

In compliance with Standard 6.5 of the National Code 2018, the College designates the Dean of Students College Counsellor as the official point of contact for international students. The Contact Officer maintains up-to-date information on internal and external support services, emergency contacts, and 24/7 emergency response availability for overseas students.

8 Handling the Media

8.1 Media Policy

The Head of College will handle all contact with the media. Any request from the media for interview should be denied until the Head of College is in possession of all the facts about the situation/incident. Students, staff and all affected parents must be informed before any information is given to the media by the school.

If the incident involves “reputation management” of the school or a member of the school community, the representative of the Board must be involved in the composition of any statement made to the media.

It is possible that the incident will be drawn to the attention of the school and the Head of College by the media. In this case the media will expect a response from the Head of College or whoever takes the message. It is easy to be caught off guard in these situations and it is essential that no-one from the school makes any comment to the media until the facts have been verified.

When the school is ready to comment the Head of College (or designated spokesperson) will give the facts and indicate the school’s position and the plan that has been put in place. It is important that the approach to the media at this stage is forthright, open and honest without breaching any confidentiality.

A media statement will be prepared with assistance, if necessary, from the School’s legal advisors/insurers. The statement will be:

- Factual
- Clear
- Concise

- Judiciously worded
- Free of emotional reactions
- On any occasions when the Head of College is interviewed by the media, the Head of College will ensure that another member of staff is there as witness and notetaker.
- It must be remembered that it is always possible that an inquiry will follow a traumatic event (School, police, coronial) any media comments made may have a bearing on proceedings of future inquiries.
- A detailed record of the media release or media statement/interview should be kept in the School's records.
- Responses made to the media or that could be passed on to the media will avoid speculative comments that may bring into question the area of negligence or blame. These could have legal implications.
- Staff and students will be protected from the media.
- All media inquiries by telephone will be directed to the Head of College
- All media inquiries/visitors will be directed politely to the Head of College's office.
- Staff members will assure the media that the School wishes to assist but that the best-informed person and the person most able to assist is the Head of College. The rule is polite avoidance of saying anything relating to the incident, whilst directing the inquiry to the Head of College.
- All staff need to be alert to the "media" person who encourages them to talk "off the record" about the incident. This is the most likely source of inaccurate, hurtful and damaging media reporting – the "misquote" or "quote out of context".
- In all instances staff must be most discreet when asked about issues by students or parents since they could be "quoted" or "misquoted". In the event of a critical incident there would be an expectation that staff not discuss such matters outside school except where they are involved in their own personal counselling.
- The School will protect the students, as far as possible, from unwarranted interviews by members of the media.
- Rumours after a traumatic event can be a very damaging phenomenon. To prevent this, regular communication is essential to:
 - Teachers
 - All ancillary staff
 - All visiting specialists
 - Students
 - Parents
 - School Board Members
- Persistent rumour could provide fuel for potential defamation charges. Such rumours would attract the media's attention and possible undesirable coverage. Consequently, rumours should be allayed early.

9 Advice for Staff

In such situations it is best to use certain responses and to avoid others.

9.1 Things to AVOID

Try to avoid saying things like:

- You'll feel better about it tomorrow;
- Something like this happened to me once.....
- Try not to be so emotional about it;
- Forget it. It's nothing to do with you;
- It's only a one in a million accident;
- Leave me out of it. I can't cope;
- Do something to take your mind off it;
- Just try and get over it;
- Just remember that time heals
- Try to avoid saying too much (a few brief, sincere words is probably enough);
- Try to avoid telling a student or a fellow staff member how they feel or ought to feel;
- Try to avoid assuming a student who seems not be grieving is not, in fact, doing so;
- Try to avoid making light of the loss, or dismissing it;
- Try to avoid offering solutions.

9.2 Helpful Responses

- Be an accepting listener. Interrupt as little as possible, not agreement and voice the occasional "mmm".
- Accept crying and anger. Be comfortable with silence.
- Try to use statements such as:
 - It's OK to feel shocked and helpless now;
 - You must be finding it really hard to believe;
 - I think we might be more comfortable in the ... room;
 - We all feel the shock of something like this;
 - It did happen and this is the result;
 - The thoughts will keep coming back at times;
 - What did you do? What else did you do?
 - When that happened, what did you feel?
 - If you want to talk quietly with each other, that's all right;
 - Do remember that ... Any sharing of memories can be helpful
- Encourage students to postpone making major decisions.
- Maintain contact with students who have shared with you through the whole incident.
- Help students to understand as best they can the stages of grief through which most people go.
- Realise that both laughing and crying can release tension. Don't be afraid to recognise humour in a situation.
- When the time feels right, gently encourage students to get on with a full school life.
- Be ever vigilant of the reactions of colleagues and parents and be prepared to provide them with support should they seek it. Mention concerns about colleagues' and parents' reactions to the Head of College.

10 Notes for Staff Assisting a group after trauma - Critical Incident Debriefing Session

10.1 Introduction

- Ideally, there should be two counselors/teachers with each group. Introduce yourselves to the group. Let them know what has happened and that you respect the rights of each person there to their own private grief.
- Explain that your job is to provide them with any information you have and to help them begin to talk about the way the trauma has affected them.
- Outline the guidelines for the session:
 - **CONFIDENTIALITY**
 - **NO-ONE FORCED/REQUIRED TO TALK**
 - **NO-ONE LEAVES UNTIL THE END**
 - **EVERY EXPRESSION OF EMOTION IS ALLOWED**
 - **NO NOTES ARE TAKEN DURING THE SESSION**
 - **FACTUAL INFORMATION**
- It is important that rumours and misconceptions be stopped;
- Ask students how they first heard about the event and ask them for the version of the event they heard;
- Where possible, correct errors in the facts, but be ready to admit that you do not know things if that is so.

10.2 If the Incident is Death

Ask questions such as

- How well did you know ...?
- When did you last see ...?
- What kind of interaction did you last have with ...?
- How are you feeling about ... now?

10.3 Feelings

- Most students will want to talk about feelings about the victim and/or the event;
- Allow everyone to speak but don't pressure anyone;
- Where suicide is involved, guilt and anger may become very noticeable;
- Some of this anger may be taken out on you. Try to reflect on what is being said without being judgmental.

10.4 Symptoms

- Ask students to describe any symptoms they are experiencing (e.g. sleeplessness, lack of concentration, irritability);
- Explain that these symptoms are normal and acceptable;
- Outline the stages of grief (see diagram);
 - Shock / disruption
 - Disbelief / denial / emotional impact
 - Working it through
 - Acceptance (resolution)
 - Reactions to reminders (anniversaries, etc.)
 - Emotional stability
- Invite students to share strategies that have worked for them. Provide information on appropriate strategies; e.g. quiet reflection, rest, regular exercise, healthy diet. Wisdom of avoiding both alcohol and frantic activity aimed at putting the disaster out of mind.

10.5 Management

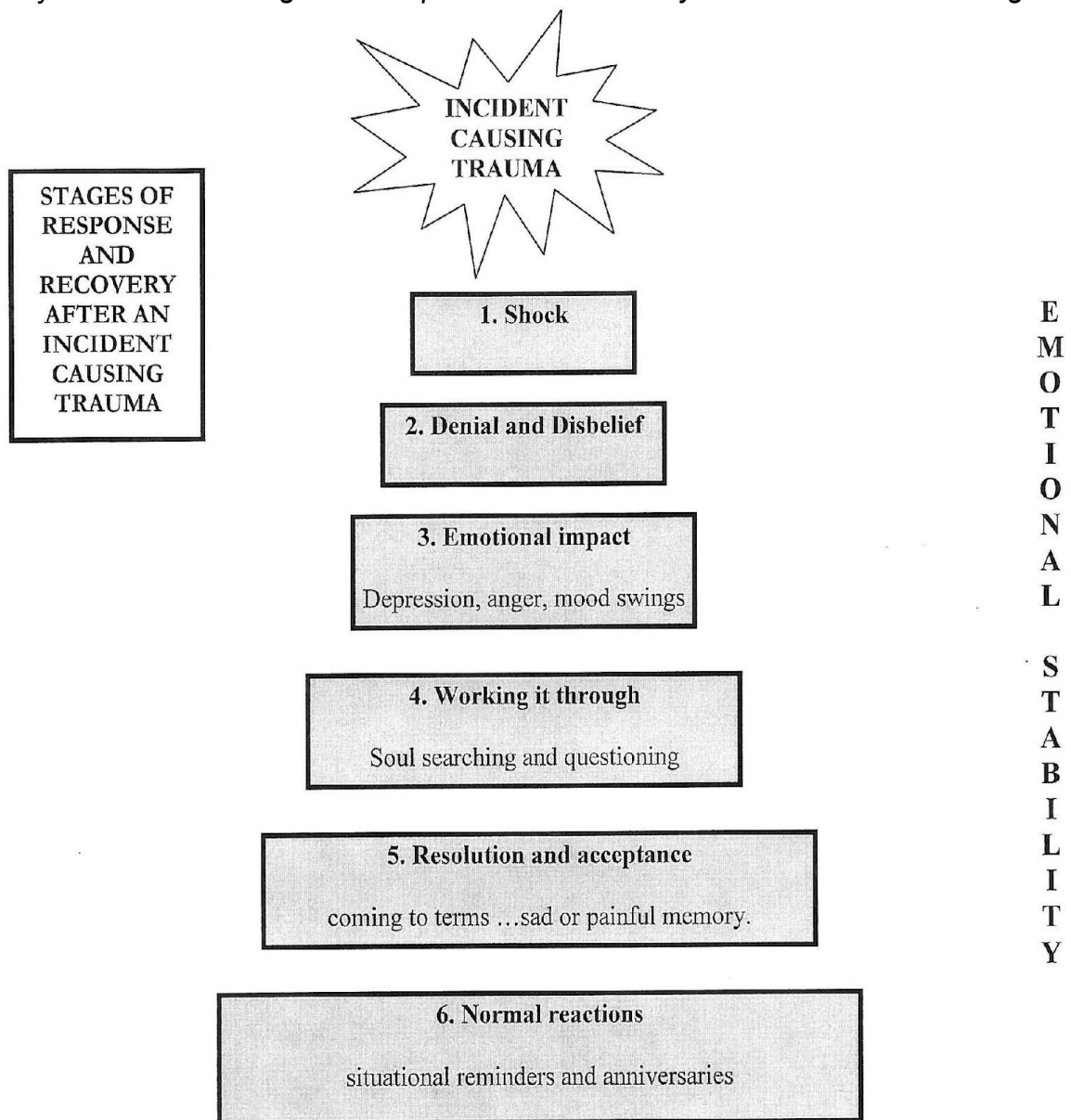
- Explain the resources that exist for counselling both inside and outside of the school;
- Encourage students to use the resources and to continue talking to each other. Prolonged, intense grief can be harmful, although it isn't going to be quick and easy for anyone;
- Invite students to continue to seek you out if they would like to talk further.

Policy Review

This plan will be reviewed annually or upon changes to legislation, best practice guidelines, or significant school structural changes.

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Appendix 1 - Pyramid Effect - *Stages of Response and Recovery after an incident causing trauma*



How to deal with people at the different stages

Stages 1, 2 & 3	Stage 4	Stages 5 & 6
♦ comforting	♦ structuring	♦ supporting
♦ consoling	♦ working through feelings	♦ withdrawing
♦ informing	♦ groupwork	♦ monitoring
♦ empathising	♦ reassuring	♦ monitoring
♦ listening	♦ empowering	
♦ reorienting	♦ monitoring	
♦ monitoring	♦ co-ordinating	
♦ co-ordinating	♦ self-monitoring	