



## **Mansfield Area Collaboration (MAC) Critical Incidents Policy**

### **Aims of policy**

- To manage the response to critical incidents in each MAC school.

### **Rationale**

- This policy gives guidance regarding procedures that must be implemented when a critical incident rises in school. A critical incident is an incident that could have a major effect on the school community. The policy should be read in conjunction with the Health and Safety policy, Child Protection and Safeguarding policy and Equality policy. This policy forms part of the school's Critical Incident Plan.

### **Definition of a critical incident**

- A critical incident is defined as any incident that is unusual, violent, and involves a perceived threat to, or actual loss of, human life, causing significant emotional distress. A critical incident could have a profound impact on the future of a school's community. When a critical incident has occurred, it might be necessary for the school community to seek outside support from agencies.

### **What could constitute a critical incident?**

- Each crisis is unique; the range and complexity are enormous. We cannot plan for every eventuality, but planning is a necessary precaution is crucial.

### **A critical incident is any incident which involves:**

- serious injury or death of a person near, or involved with, the school (e.g. child, parent, staff member, governor)
- any incident eliciting a profoundly emotional response (this might be an immediate or a delayed emotional reaction)

- any incident attracting attention from the news media
- any incident involving serious threat to a member of the school community

**Examples of such incidents include:**

- murder of a pupil by a pupil
- murder of a pupil by a stranger
- fatal road traffic accidents
- serious/fatal injuries on school visits
- serious infectious diseases e.g. suspected meningitis
- pupil suicide
- teacher suicide
- (sudden) death of pupil or staff member
- the consequence of terrorist or criminal activity
- arson attacks
- abduction
- accidental death
- allegations of abuse by staff
- rumours of any of the above
- chemical attack
- bomb threat
- intruder on site threat
- snow closure
- school-wide communication failure

**Purpose**

- To ensure all staff and governors are aware of procedures in the event of a critical incident.
- To ensure that all staff, governors and children are kept safe whether on or off site.
- To ensure parents are kept informed as necessary and appropriate for the situation.
- To ensure the Local Authority team become involved as soon as possible to help the community come to terms with the incident.
- To ensure any publicity regarding the situation/incident protects the good name of each school and the community.

## **Guidelines**

Each school has its own Critical Incidents Team. Each member has a specific job description which has been agreed by the Headteacher.

Typically, each school's Critical Incidents Team includes:

- Head of Operations – Headteacher
  - Deputy Head of Operations – Deputy Headteacher
  - Head of Communications
  - Head of Site Operations - Business Manager
  - Governor Liaison – Chair of Governors
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- a) The safety of children and staff is paramount - only the group leader (on a visit) or the designated person in school will relay **ANY** information and will stipulate to whom it should be divulged.
  - b) The Critical Incident Team will decide on the way in which parents are informed of the incident, and of how much of the situation it is necessary to divulge.
  - c) Depending on the incident, the Local Authority will be informed as soon as possible, and advice will be taken as to next steps.
  - d) The Headteacher will deal with the media **ONLY** once advice has been sought from the Local Authority. Press statements will only be made in collaboration with the LA.

## **Action within the first hour of a Critical Incident**

Obtain and collate information about what has happened, keeping central notes:

- Where and when?
- What happened?
- Name and contact of adult at incident
- Extent of injuries, numbers and names
- Location of injured person, name and contact number of adult present
- Location of any uninjured people, name and contact number of adult present

- Is help required from school?
- Who has been informed already?
- What has been said, and to whom?
- Are emergency services involved – if so which ones?
- Name of liaison officer from the emergency services
- Gather and brief SLT including School Business Manager
- Contact LA
- Contact families of children involved
- School to be prepared to offer emotional support
- Make arrangements for informing other parents
- It may be sufficient to send a letter with children. In some cases, it will be appropriate to hold a meeting at school, especially if the incident is one which will generate concern about some aspect of the school's organisation (e.g. following injury or violence at school). SLT can provide a leaflet for parents to accompany a letter home in some situations.
- A prepared statement should give necessary facts, expression of sympathy and concern, and possibly a message for the community. It is important to remember that a letter is likely to be accessible to the media, so seek guidance from the LA. Consider delaying the letter by two or three days until full information is available. Sometimes the letter will need to go out immediately.
- Headteacher to consult the LA to check the contents of any such letters or statements.

### **Inform teaching and support staff**

- All adults in contact with pupils must be kept well informed and feel secure in handling questions and comments. A schedule for updating must be arranged, e.g. during break times, at the end of the day, or first thing in the morning. This is to ensure knowledge is common and questions are answered. Staff should be cautioned about speaking to the media or responding to questions from parents.

### **Inform pupils**

- This is best done in classes. Care must be taken to protect and support children close to someone involved with the incident. Staff need to be able to handle the emotions or distress confidently. Children should

receive a consistent account of the incident while allowing for differences in their ability to understand.

- Children should only be told what they need to know and this should be appropriate to their age.
- Be mindful that, in some cases, children and staff will want to talk about the incident before they go home.
- Schools should deal with the media only through the Local Authority, particularly before agreeing to be interviewed or releasing names of children or staff.
- With the LA, prepare a press release from which anyone confronted by the media can speak. Use a designated spokesperson (usually the Headteacher) to make direct response for the school.

### **What to do when dealing with the news media**

- 1) Respond to what and when questions.
- 2) Tell your story quickly, accurately and get key messages across.
- 3) Consider, when possible, the needs of the audience.
- 4) Choose your own time to talk to the media.
- 5) Prepare and rehearse so everyone has the same story.

### **What not to do when What not to do in facing the news media**

- 6) Do not reply to how and why questions.
  - 7) Do not speculate.
  - 8) Do not bluff or lie.
  - 9) Do not make “off the record” comments.
  - 10) Do not make promises you cannot keep.
  - 11) Do not make excuses or blame others.
  - 12) Do not respond to “blind quotes”, e.g. “One of your staff says...”
  - 13) Do not say “No comment.” Explain why you cannot comment.
  - 14) Do not allow words to be put in your mouth, e.g. “Would you agree that....?”
- Clear, direct communication within the school community can limit the impact of sensational media coverage. Pupils, staff, governors and parents all need appropriate, up-to-date release of information. They will need to be reminded not to speculate or to respond to rumours.

### **Action within hours**

People react very differently to the same situation; some will readily give vent to their feelings, others will find it more difficult. Both are normal. Pupils' ages and development will of course affect their understanding and feelings. Common reactions can be denial, distress, guilt, anger and helplessness.

### **Handling the reactions of people affected**

#### **Information about the incident**

- Inform all staff and give guidance on how to support and talk to the children.
- Confront the truth and take care with the form of words in announcements.
- Provide an outline of measures in place in school to provide further help for distressed pupils.
- Provide information to families on the kinds of help and support available to them and their children.

#### **Explicit acknowledgement about the incident**

The management of a critical incident can result in a lot of stress.

- Acknowledge the emotional state of staff and children and allow time and space where needed.
- Some staff may not wish or be able to be directly involved in supporting children.
- The burden of support may fall disproportionately on a small number of staff.

#### **Opportunity to talk through or express personal reactions**

- Acknowledge that an 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.

#### **Supporters need support**

- Be aware of the possible delayed reactions of those actively involved in responding to a critical incident. Staff who are co-ordinating the school's response should be supported and scheduled for relief periods.

- Teachers are vital in supporting pupils through a critical incident; but teachers facing this need deserve informed guidance and emotional support themselves.
- Be aware of needs of others.

### **Formal and informal recognition and rituals**

- Arrangements may be made to express sympathy to families directly affected.
- Injured children can be visited in hospital.
- Children can be encouraged to send cards and letters.
- Plan to attend a funeral, if welcome. (School closure is possible at discretion of Head Teacher and governors).
- Discuss 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 and support.

### **Continuing or quickly establishing usual routines**

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

### **Return to school by pupils or staff directly affected**

- Some may not be attending school after an incident and will need assistance on re-entry.
- Some may have been injured or distressed and will need significant support to re-integrate.

### **Implications for the wider curriculum**

- Inclusion of training for staff in areas such as loss, change or bereavement.
- Relaxation techniques, positive imagery within PSHE.
- PSHE - cycle of life and death.
- Loss, change and bereavement as dealt with by different races and cultures.

## **Arson Attacks**

- The sense of loss, distress and anger can be severe.
- Impacts on morale can last for months after the fire.
- Pressure on staff to restore normal routines quickly on a new or restricted site leaves too little room for grieving, for ritual endings and for reflection.

## **Services to contact in the event of a Critical Incident**

**These services can include:**

### **Communications team**

For advice/guidance to LA schools about the media including social media:

- [news@nottsc.gov.uk](mailto:news@nottsc.gov.uk)
- Customer service team 0300 500 80 80 and ask to speak to the communications team

### **Central emergency contact**

- Jen Sheriston (Head of media and major projects, chief executive's department)
- 0115 977 3881 or 07799 177980

### **HR**

For advice/guidance to LA schools about HR/personnel matters:

- [hrdutydesk@nottsc.gov.uk](mailto:hrdutydesk@nottsc.gov.uk)
- 0115 9774433

### **Educational Psychology Service**

For advice/support around managing a Critical Incident and/or bereavement

- The school SENCO and/or family SENCO should have the direct contact email and number of the link Educational Psychologist for the school.
- 0115 9772924 or [epsadmin@nottsc.gov.uk](mailto:epsadmin@nottsc.gov.uk). Schools can ask for an urgent message to be sent to the link EP and the district Senior EP for the area, requesting support regarding a critical incident. If you need an immediate conversation, ask to speak to any available member of the Senior Leadership Team.

### **CAMHS**

- For advice/support around specific mental health concerns such as where a suspected suicide has taken place within the pupil community and school leaders want advice to support the peer group effectively.

Contact via the Single Point of Access:

- 0115 854 2299
- [SPArefferrals@nottshc.nhs.uk](mailto:SPArefferrals@nottshc.nhs.uk)

#### **OUT OF HOURS CONTACT**

- If a critical incident occurs out of hours, schools are advised to contact the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Emergency Duty Team on 0300 456 4546. The Emergency Duty officer will take the details of the emergency and pass the details onto the NCC Education department to make contact with you asap to confirm next steps.

## **APPENDIX 1 Staff Cascade**

- a) Headteacher to inform SLT.
- b) Deputy head to inform administrative and support staff.
- c) Deputy head to inform midday supervisory assistants.
- d) Key stage leaders to inform class teachers.
- e) Class teachers to inform TAs.

## **Parent Cascade**

Parents to be informed by notices outside the school and/or by the class teacher by telephone if this is deemed appropriate by the SLT.

## **Governor Cascade**

Headteacher to inform Chair and Vice Chair.

Chair to inform other governors.

## CRISIS MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST (1)

The following checklist will help an effective plan to be formulated

| ACTION  | DONE |
|---|------|
| Have we identified the likely crisis that could occur?  |      |
| What prepared statements do we need to cover the school's attitudes to the situations?  |      |
| Have we considered all communication needs and target audiences?  |      |
| What systems exist at present to handle a crisis?   |      |
| Are these systems co-ordinated and do they cover all the media?   |      |
| Has a central communications plan been agreed to co-ordinate all information channels within the school and its external audiences? |      |
| Have key personnel been identified?   |      |
| Have the members of the crisis team been allocated specific roles?  |      |
| Does the system allow for absences due to holidays, sickness-i.e. is it possible to alert someone 24 hours a day, 365 days a year?  |      |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Has everyone clear instructions what they should do in an emergency procedure?  |  |
| Do we have agreed procedures for handling information and dealing with media enquiries?   |  |
| Who is authorised to act as specific spokesperson?  |  |
| Do we have an adequate budget to handle an emergency?   |  |
| Do all school staff appreciate the importance of handling the media calmly, efficiently and positively during and after a crisis?                       |  |
| Do we have procedures to monitor and record the handling of the operation so we can assess the efficiency and ways it could be improved for the future? |  |

### **CRISIS MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST (2)**

The following checklist should be used as a reminder list of actions that should be taken when a crisis arises.

| <b>Action</b>  | <b>By whom</b>   | <b>Done</b> |
|--|--|-------------|
| Agree specific crisis team and individual responsibilities                 | Headteacher<br>Deputies & SLT,<br>Caretaker,<br>Chair / Vice<br>Chair of Govs. |             |
| Agree key spokesperson to contact Borough media                            | Head of<br>Communications  |             |
| If necessary, put the closing of the school plan into place (see Appendix) |  |             |

|  |                                  |  |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| Immediately call a meeting with the crisis team in order to: fully brief the team on the situation and their responsibilities prepare an appropriate statement for the Local Authority Press Office - only they speak to the press; confirm a plan of action | Head of Operations/<br>Deputy HT |  |
| Ascertain whether extra support staff are needed   | Head of Operations/<br>Deputy HT |  |
| Inform Borough Critical Incidents Team (through CS)  | Communications Director          |  |
| Ascertain whether additional physical support resources are required   | Head of Operations/<br>Deputy HT |  |
| Establish Communications Centre (through Local Authority Media Centre)   | Head of Communications           |  |
| Communicate to all appropriate internal audiences that ALL communication must go through the identified spokesperson only  | Head of Operations/<br>Deputy HT |  |
| Fully brief all internal audiences e.g. staff, pupils, GB  | Head of Operations/<br>Deputy HT |  |
| Monitor situation and ensure main spokesperson on hand to answer any additional queries  | Head of Operations/<br>Deputy HT |  |
| Once everything has calmed down hold a structure debriefing  | Head of Operations/<br>Deputy HT |  |