

The Riverina Anglican College	Policy No. 17	
<b>CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT</b>	Effective: May 2000 Revised: February 2013	Page 1 of 7

## Definition

A critical incident occurs when an event or events are deemed to be sufficiently serious to require counseling of more than one student. This may be as a result of trauma through the death or incapacity to a student or staff member, family crisis or community event.

## Rationale

Sudden death or a crisis such as an accident, drowning, murder or suicide, or a hostage situation, has a major affect on family, friends and school staff who know the person. The school is a major part of the child's support system. The school may also be faced with a natural disaster. The College's crisis management strategy can contribute to assisting staff and students with their grieving process, their understanding of death, their feelings about their faith, with readjustment and acceptance. Unresolved grief can lead to severe emotional difficulties, physical illness and contribute to a crisis later in their life. It is important to respond quickly because rumours will spread rapidly. Providing accurate information as early as possible is important to decrease unrest.

## Ambition

The College policy will:

- Provide an opportunity for a collective process to grieve the loss of a member.

- Encourage expression of concerns and feelings.

- Discuss the process of grieving with staff and students.

- Aim to re-establish normality in the school with appropriate guidelines.

- Continue to monitor behaviour and identify students experiencing stress or who are at risk.

- Provide support for those who have extra tasks of organizing, responding and supporting, and for those who have worked closely with the affected school member.

## **Action Plan**

The decision to employ the Critical Incident Management programme is taken by the Principal or their delegate. The following personnel may be called upon to assist in a CIM incident:

Mr Michael Lance	School Counsellor	69331811
Rev Dr David Willsher	School Chaplain	69331811
Rev Genieve Blackwell	St Paul's Turvey Park	69241707
Bishop Stuart Robinson	Bishop	62480811
Dr Charles Oliver	Doctor	69252242

Headed by the Principal or delegate of the Principal, one or more of these personnel are formed into an immediate intervention co-ordination team.

## **Tasks of the CIM Team**

### **General Tasks**

The crisis team needs to coordinate the strategy to be implemented and develop documented information for the staff, after consultation with the family.

Allocate tasks to staff.

Decide how and when staff and then students be informed.

Set aside a support centre, with refreshments during the day for distressed students. Arrange extra staff for yard duty throughout the day.

Plan the necessary changes to the timetable for the day.

Decide if an opportunity for a time of prayer should be made available, for students and staff who wish to attend. It is important for this to be done with small groups rather than one large group. Many students and some staff may feel uncomfortable or even anger towards the use of the pastoral or faith perspective, individually, or in groups. This may be misplaced anger, or seen as an attempt to deny them their individual grief. Contact a doctor, nurse or staff person with first aid expertise to be available in case of severe physical stress reactions in school members.

The Counselor should consider advising Student and Family Counselling, who will provide a team to assist the school with counseling of students, staff, families if required, and debriefing. The Counselor will need to liaise with other schools, where there are siblings involved.

The Counsellor or Principal needs to advise the other schools in the area so they are prepared for any reactions in their schools and to dispel rumours.

Media requests are to be dealt with by the principal. (Please refer to Section on Media)

Compose a letter to parents, briefly stating the event and providing them with information on signs of distress or possible changes in behaviour, the school's plan and where to come for help.

### **Working With Staff**

The crisis team members need to prepare the information they wish to give to staff. A staff meeting should be called as soon as possible. All staff should be informed at the same time, so that they have the same information.

Staff need to be given a little time for their own expression of feelings.

A briefing of possible grief reactions of students should be given by the counsellor. A prepared statement should be given to staff to share with students. Staff should be helped with initiating discussion of the kinds of questions that may be asked, and to answer staff concerns.

Staff need to be advised of the school's management plan and the facilities available for students.

Support resources for staff need to be mentioned.

Updates to staff on the current situation during the day are essential.

Debriefing at the end of the day is crucial.

Shock reactions of staff may occur; the possibility of staff advising the students in advance of the planned time can be a result of this. Discussing this with staff may prevent this from happening.

Staff close to the person concerned may need special support, or those who have personally experienced a similar situation, eg suicide.

Monitoring the workloads of caregivers is important.

### **Working with Students**

Students need a safe environment for exploration of their grief.

The prepared statement shared with students needs to be brief, factual and include facilities available.

All students need to be advised simultaneously, in classes or pastoral care groups.

However public announcements at Chapel, assemblies or over PA systems should be avoided.

Close friends of those involved in the crisis, need to be identified by staff and given individual counselling almost immediately. Parents of close friends could be contacted personally; some of these students may need to be with their parents.

Counsellors and staff should be available in the support centre.

Inability to answer student's questions is normal; staff can be honest and seek help on the appropriate response.

There may be students who will not be comfortable in class or the support centre; they may wander in the school grounds. Extra staff on duty can encourage them to accept support.

More time is required with the affected student's class(es) or pastoral care group. The nature of the discussion depends on the age of the student's class; this could include permission to talk about the person, how to give each other support, to review grief and the normality of the intensity of a person's feelings; particularly with adolescents. The question of attending to the student's desk needs to be addressed.

Class discussion needs to cover that each student will have different ways of dealing with feelings and ability to cope. Students who do not feel close to the affected student should not feel guilty about lack of apparent remorse, while respecting those who do. Some students who seem disinterested or difficult may have less skills to cope or need to deny the fear to protect themselves.

### Day 2 – Day 8

The crisis team needs to reconvene to monitor the situation, inform staff of the current developments and look after themselves.

Our philosophy encourages staff to consider the total care of students. It is important in a crisis that caregivers do not try and take full responsibility for the care of individuals. They should be helped to highlight the need to help themselves, and meet more often to diffuse their stress.

Working with students needs to include education on grief and loss, stress management, human relations, the normality of feelings adolescents have.

Emphasis can be on resources for living.

Some students may still use the support centre. Students and parents need to be advised that students are expected to attend school and reminded of the facilities available. (This is preferable to students being on their own at home or wandering the streets.)

Carefully monitor students and staff who show extreme reactions.

### **Long Term Intervention**

Where a death has occurred, a memorial service planned with the students and family could be held. The timing of this is important. This is an opportunity to remember the person, to express a communal loss; however, dramatizing a death, (especially a suicide) can have a negative impact on students who are at risk. The content and process of a service needs to be carefully planned.

Emphasis should be on the value of life, on God's love for each person, the waste of the loss, the gift of life and the discouragement of guilt. All are challenged but some of the challenges can be over overwhelming. Encourage them to seek help, if they feel this way.

### **Parents**

A letter to parents of the student's class or year should be sent home the first day, advising them of the incident or school member's death. Parents need to be aware of behavioural changes they may notice. Encourage them to provide support and to seek help. Adolescents often look to their peers for support - families need to be informed that this is normal.

There may be a need to offer to parents the opportunity to meet after 3 or 4 weeks, particularly where a number of students were involved or there were several suicides close together.

### **The Funeral**

If there is a funeral that students might attend there needs to be a discussion with the family involved and other parental advice should be sought.

The size of the school, and the year level of the student may need to be considered. In particular, relevant staff, the student's year level and other students with their parent's permission, may attend. A practice information sharing on the service may help school members and be less overwhelming time. Staff need to be aware that some students can make an issue of whom among their peers should attend the funeral.

## **Grief Reactions**

Denial: This includes disbelief and shock and sadness.

Anger This may be directed towards God or displaced onto other people. Guilt tends to be high in sudden death particularly suicide and murder.

Bargaining: Hoping the person will return, if they fulfill certain promises.

Depression: Needing to be alone more often than usual; beginning to realise that the person is not coming back.

Acceptance: Adapting to the change in their life and able to move on with their own plans.

Trauma can cause stress reactions. School members may experience sickness, exhaustion, loss of appetite and inability to sleep.

Students may not be able to concentrate, seem preoccupied or be day-dreaming, or feel out of control of emotions they may have never experienced before. They may question their own life and death, or be unable to complete assignments and become frustrated by the changes in themselves. Adolescents' emotions are heightened during this stage of life, so extreme behaviour may occur to express these strong feelings, including violence, withdrawal and overwhelming sadness.

Guilt and feelings of failure towards the deceased person can be overpowering for individuals. Staff and students need to be reassured that such emotional reactions are normal after an abnormal event.

Writing of personal diaries, planning ways of preventing loss and injury in some incidents may help older students.

Counselling and support is valuable for stressed school members.

Length of grieving varies for individuals. Time heals for most students. In the case of severe trauma including suicide, 3 months and a year have been identified as stages where other students are at risk. Staff may need to monitor students carefully at these times.

Some students may need longer term help; small groups established for support can be useful.

## **The Media**

The Principal should be the only one to liaise with the media, after consultation with the family. It is important to protect the privacy of the family and the other students

at a time when they are distressed. There could be legal proceedings which may be affected by comments made. Sudden death, a bus accident or hostage situation could involve a coronial inquest or other proceedings.

Research has shown that reports by media on real or fictional suicide may precipitate young people to kill themselves. The students' perception of attention and heroism obtained through the media's presentation, may suggest that suicide is an acceptable alternative. This is particularly so where the media sensationalises the situation. We have no control over the media's final comments.

### **Special Occasions**

Birthdays of the deceased, Christmas, Easter, anniversary of the incident, or some other significant association or crisis, may unexpectedly trigger emotional reactions. The school community needs to be aware that this can happen. In some situations this can lead to previously delayed grief occurring.

### **Suicide**

All the issues and aspects of grief apply to suicide, but they can be more intense or extreme.

After a suicide, care should be taken to stress that this was the person's choice. But it is a very poor choice. It is important not to romanticise the deceased or encourage feelings that he or she is a hero. People can feel anger towards the person for not seeking help and for leaving them.

Teachers need to be aware that students can be seriously affected by a suicide or a murder, particularly children who are or have experienced some other loss, have poor self-esteem, who are isolated and have an inadequate support system outside of the school, or who are depressed.

Even if a school or individual or counsellor does try to help someone who may be at risk, this does not mean that this person will be prevented from succeeding. It is their decision finally.

\*\*\* This needs to be stressed with the relevant staff and peers.