

The Avenue School

Policy & Procedure Document

Policy number	4.16	Version	1.0
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Responsible person	Principal	Scheduled review date	25/06/2027
Policy Area	Student Welfare		

Title: Critical Incident Management

Purpose and Scope

Emergencies and critical incidents in the workplace can affect people physically and psychologically and affect continuity of education at The Avenue School.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure The Avenue School prepares for and effectively responds to emergency situations and critical incidents through the appropriate use of resources. The prevention and effective management of critical incidents can assist to minimise the negative impact of an unexpected event.

This policy applies to all staff, teachers, volunteers, Board members, students and visitors.

Definitions

A critical incident is an unexpected traumatic event, involving personal or professional threat, which evokes extreme stress, fear or injury. Providing appropriate supports following a critical incident is part of emergency management.

A critical incident includes:

- Death, or life-threatening injury, of a student or staff member at school, or following an incident that occurred at the school, or through a related school-based activity or circumstance.
- Circumstances that pose a critical risk to the health or safety of one or more students or staff.
- Receipt of an allegation of child abuse, including but not limited to sexual abuse, committed against a student by a staff member or student, or another person on the school premises or during school related activities, whether the abuse is alleged to have occurred recently or in the past.
- Issuing a formal warning to a staff member or ceasing the employment of a staff member for a breach of the Staff Code of Conduct suspected to be grooming behaviour.
- Any incident requiring school closure, lockdown, or a reduction in the number of students or staff attending.

At The Avenue School a Critical Incident may occur at the school, outside the school on school-organised activities or in the community and significantly impacts on the wellbeing of students, staff, volunteers and parents.

A traumatic event is one in which a person witnesses or is confronted by an experience that involves actual, threatened or perceived death or serious injury and/ or threat to own or others physical and

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emotional integrity. The person's response may then include intense fear, feelings of helplessness and horror, which impact on their sense of 'self'.

Complex trauma refers to a condition resulting from multiple exposures to one or more traumas. When repeatedly exposed to traumatic stress, disruptions can occur in brain structure and function, central and autonomic nervous system arousal, endocrinological and immunological function. These biological disruptions interact with psychological, emotional, cognitive and spiritual processes.

Critical Incident Debriefing (CID) is a preventative health measure to minimise the impact of traumatic events and the development of major psychological health problems such as Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) Disorder.

Principles

Emergency management planning is undertaken to assist in being prepared for events or incidents that stretch our ability to cope beyond normal day-to-day capacity. The Avenue School swiftly and effectively responds to emergency situations, with the foremost goals of preserving life, protecting people and property, and restoring operations as quickly as possible.

Critical incidents can be a threatening experience and appropriate supports are required to minimise long term effects arising from exposure to the trauma. The negative impacts of emergency situations and critical incidents are minimised through effective planning and management.

Risk Minimisation

- Disaster and emergency response procedures are included in staff induction information and raised at staff meetings.
- The Emergency management plan is reviewed annually and/or following the event of a disaster or emergency situation.
- As far as possible, traumatic events are prevented. In the circumstance of a traumatic event, strategies are put in place to minimise the effect of trauma as much as possible.

Managing Critical Incidents

1. Respond to any emergency:

If there is immediate risk of harm, ensure that the safety and wellbeing of all people present is protected. This should involve calling 000 for Emergency Services, separating people involved or removing a person from a situation, cordoning off any 'crisis' area and keeping students away and engaging other responsible people to assist in a coordinated response.

Implement the following measures:

- Establish a recovery area where distressed people can be cared for appropriately.
- Ensure all students are still present or establish where they are.
- Manage entry to the school.
- Ensure that students/staff do not make calls out of the school.
- Ensure the school continues to operate as normally as possible.
- Establish the Critical Incident Recovery Team (inform the Board Chair).
- Determine if it is necessary to close the school and for how long.
- Determine if staff replacements can be engaged to cover for affected staff.

2. Provide support:

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It is important to provide ongoing support to any parties impacted by the incident from the time of the incident or disclosure until the matter is resolved. This includes the child, witnesses, and any staff who have been involved in the response. Even if a person was only impacted indirectly, it will be important to monitor for vicarious trauma or other wellbeing concerns. Ensure support is trauma-informed and engage with appropriately qualified professionals where required.

3. Assess the incident and escalate accordingly:
Reporting obligations may involve the following:

- Police
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
- Child Protection
- E-Safety Commissioner
- Workcover (within 48 hours)

Records should be kept of the enquiries made and advice or guidance provided. Where there are legal or reputational risks involved, it may be important to obtain legal advice. Similarly, where an incident requires an organisation to investigate allegations, it might be appropriate to engage an independent investigator.

4. Secure any evidence:
It will be important to secure any evidence in a manner that is safe and consistent with legal obligations.

5. Make and maintain records:
Make and maintain records of any incidents, consistent with policies and any legal obligations. Records should be made consistent with the Record-keeping Principles and be full and accurate, about all incidents, responses and decisions. Records should be maintained appropriately and only disposed of in accordance with law or policy. All details must be verified.

Records will include the:

- Nature of the incident.
- Location of the incident, number and names of persons involved.
- Name of the person reporting the incident.
- Time incident reported.
- Contact telephone number if away from school.

6. Inform parents or carers if and when appropriate:
It is important to keep a child's parents or carers informed about the child's safety. However, where there are concerns that abuse has occurred within the child's family or home, this may pose further risk. You should consult with the relevant authority, such as Police or Child Protection, before doing so.

7. Address any breaches:
Where a critical incident occurred due to an employee of The Avenue School, it may be important to suspend them and conduct an investigation. Depending on the circumstances, that may involve taking disciplinary action and/or notifying any relevant regulatory bodies (such as the Victorian Institute of Teaching, if it involves a teacher).

8. Provide ongoing support:
Support and communication with those affected should be ongoing, particularly where there are concerns for health, safety or wellbeing. Ensure that your organisation has appropriate supports in place to minimise further risks of harm, and that they are effectively communicated.

9. Conduct an evaluation and debrief:
Safeguarding policies, procedures and codes of conduct should be regularly reviewed, evaluated and updated, including after every critical incident. A debrief is an effective way to ensure that staff who responded to the incident can identify gaps in the policies and procedures and key learnings from the response process.

Critical Incident Recovery Team (CIRT)

A Critical Incident Recovery team (CIRT) will be nominated by the Principal and the Board Chair. It is designed specifically to assist the school in managing a Critical Incident of any kind in such a way as to give highest priority to the best interests of the student or students affected.

The CIRT will develop a Critical Incident Action Plan to provide guidance for the response to the incident and will ensure that the needs of all those affected by the critical incident are considered.

Critical Incident Action Plan

The Critical Incident Action Plan will include:

- An assessment of risks and response actions.
- Identifying short, medium and long-term tasks.
- Identifying students and staff most affected.
- Contacting the affected person’s relatives.
- Support (as appropriate) to the family in the form of:
 - Managing messaging relating to the incident.
 - Liaising with them on a regular basis.
 - Arrangements for hospital/funeral/memorial service/repatriation.
 - Assisting with personal items and affairs including insurance issues.
- Informing all staff as soon as possible.
- Informing students.
- Meeting with students in groups or individually for debriefing.
- Informing parents/guardians.
- Short term and long-term counselling requirements for groups or individuals
- Liaising with emergency and other services.
- Establishing facts and coordinating incident reports.
- Liaising with other organisations and the media
- Providing counselling and support for staff, board members, volunteers, students and consumers not directly involved in, but affected by, the incident.
- Maintaining normalcy as much as possible and continue routine school activities where practical. Consider activities such as card making or writing a letter etc.
- Maintain the recovery room and arrange for a supervisor for affected students.
- Prepare a statement for the media (as required).
- Attend to legal obligations (as required).

Critical Incident Debriefing (CID)

The availability of critical incident debriefing is an essential component of The Avenue School’s approach to emergency management. Supportive counselling will be provided to staff, volunteers, students and Board members who are affected by an emergency or critical incident as soon as possible after the event (for defusing and mobilisation) and then within 48 to 72 hours (for critical incident debriefing).

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Critical Incident Debriefing (CID) will occur within 48 - 72 hours after the incident. The Principal will source an appropriate provider of CID services.

Debriefing may include individual and group counselling, where the aim is to:

- Decrease feelings of isolation
- Provide people affected by the incident with a facilitated session to assist them to normalise their thoughts and feelings. Groups assist people to explore their differing perspectives of the incident and share their similar thoughts and feelings.
- There will usually be an initial counselling session, followed up with one or more debriefing sessions.
- A need for ongoing psychological support will be referred to Workcover.

Initial counselling will occur as soon as possible after the incident, preferably immediately or within a few hours. Depending on the type or severity of the critical incident, initial defusing may include:

- A short factual statement about what is known about the incident, the possible effects on those involved, what is being done for them and what is going to happen in the future, eg.; planned debriefing sessions.
- Information on acute stress response (what is happening to people now) and how people can care for themselves. See Information Handout *Critical Incident_ Information Handout*
- An arrangement for a structured debriefing session within 48-72 hours.
- The provision of different levels of service for those differently affected
- Referrals to various resources including counsellors.

Critical Incident Reporting

Critical incident reports must be in written form and must be:

- Provided to the Principal or Youth Worker.
- Completed by the staff member(s) involved in the incident or those who have been notified of the incident.
- Contain as much information as possible and indicate the people directly involved in the incident.
- Specific and detailed
- Factual and not contain any speculation, here-say or assumptions.

Any staff member who receives a report, that meets the criteria for a critical incident must contact the Principal immediately. They must ensure that the person(s) identified in the critical incident receives all appropriate support including services as may be necessary. Incident reports are confidential and are kept securely in the Principal's office.

The Principal will conduct a review of actions arising from the above meeting to ensure:

- Follow up such as de-briefing, counselling and prevention strategies have been completed.
- Relevant people have been informed of all outcomes from the incident.
- A recommendation regarding the response is to be documented and learnings included in the quality improvement cycle.
- Further follow up, as may be required is documented and responsibilities allocated to appropriate staff.

Associated documents:

- Critical Incidents_Information Handout

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