

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

This policy is informed by:

- Crisis Management Plan (*reviewed May 2013*)

Statement:

This policy is concerned with the School's response to a critical incident where a person/people are likely to experience unusually strong emotional or psychological reactions to accidents, trauma, natural disasters, hostile acts, even death.

A Critical Incident, or crisis, may be defined as: "an event which causes disruption to an organisation creates significant danger or risk and which creates a situation where staff, students and parents feel unsafe, vulnerable and under stress, or injured".

Rationale:

The Critical Incident Policy has been written to enable Canberra Montessori School to respond appropriately in order to contain the incident and minimise damage. Coping with grief, pain and distress following a critical incident is emotionally and physically demanding for all concerned. In a critical incident the deference to procedure should ensure the likelihood for inappropriate reaction to a critical incident is avoided.

Specific Practices & Procedures:

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) shall consist of: Principal (as Chair) School Board Chairperson, and two nominated members of staff. The most important thing for the CIMT to undertake is to determine who has been involved in the critical incident, who needs to be informed of the incident, who will require assistance and what level of assistance is required.

Examples of critical incidents are:

- *Death in the School community of a student, staff member, ex-student, friend through sudden death – by accident, by suicide, by murder*
- *Serious injury of a member of the School community*
- *Students lost or injured during an excursion/incursion or missing*
- *Students and staff members being taken hostage*
- *Violent assault on a member of the School community*
- *Stalking*
- *Violent community events*

- *Witnessing of a serious accident or of violence by a member of the School community, for example, murder, a serious accident, war, act of terrorism or similar violence*
- *Significant vandalism of School property or destruction of part or whole of the School property*
- *Fire, bomb threat, explosion, gas or chemical hazard, flood, earthquake, windstorm, hailstorm or extremes of temperature*
- *Sexual assault.*

The Principal in consultation with CIMT will decide if an incident requires being classified as 'critical'. In the Principal's absence, a decision will be taken by the nominated Acting Principal in consultation with the School Board Chairperson.

GOALS OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. To provide support systems and a safe place for individuals at this period of time
2. To provide accurate information and to maintain communication links within the School and to outside sources
3. To help restore and maintain a supportive, positive, learning environment, as soon as possible
4. To reduce psychological suffering and help the School community survive the traumatic situation
5. To assist in making appropriate referrals and follow-up resources available to students and staff

The responsibilities of the CIMT committee include:

- i) Risk assessment of hazards and situations which may require emergency action
- ii) Analysis of requirements to address these hazards
- iii) Establishment of liaison with all relevant emergency services e.g. police, fire brigade, ambulance, hospital, poisons information centre, community health services
- iv) 24 hour access to contact details for all students and their families
- v) For overseas students this will also include agents, homestay families, carers, consular staff, embassies and interpreting services if necessary)
- vi) 24 hour access to contact details for all relevant staff members needed in the event of a critical incident e.g. school counsellor, welfare officer, legal services or school security
- vii) Development of a critical incident plan for the critical incident identified

- viii) Dissemination of planned procedures
- ix) Organisation of practice drills
- x) Regular review of the critical incident plan
- xi) Assisting with implementation of the critical incident plan
- xii) Arranging appropriate staff development
- xiii) Budget allocation for emergencies

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

The CIMT needs to determine if any involvement with the media is necessary. In the event of a critical incident, the Principal will be solely responsible for media statements. Under no circumstances should any other person see it as their role to deal with the media. School personnel must be instructed not to speak to the media – this is the role of Principal. Media statements should not be made until parents of affected children have been advised.

FOR THE OFFICE RECEPTIONIST

The role of the Office Receptionist is to help manage the critical incident. The CIMT is responsible for ensuring that the Receptionist has up to date and factual information. Dealing with parents and the media – refer them directly to the Principal. Dealing with offers of assistance – thank the caller, take the callers details and their particular offer, compile a list of names and offers. The school Office Receptionist will need to take time out and look after themselves.

Phase One – Immediate response

The person first aware of the incident is to report the incident to the Principal and/or School Board Chairperson without delay. In the event of repeated failed attempts to contact the Principal and/or School Board Chairperson the person first aware of the incident is to report the incident to another member of the CIMT. A text or phone message is NOT an acceptable means of communication.

- Prior to any other action; the safety of adults and children in the immediate vicinity is to be ensured.
- The Principal and/or School Board Chairperson or member of the CIMT are to initiate emergency response where appropriate.
- First aid is to be provided to any persons injured or suffering.
- Detailed and accurate information is to be gathered from person/s first hand and presented to CIMT.

Including:

- If student is on campus

- Seriousness of injury/incident and subsequent actions taken
- Call emergency services if required
- If emergency services are required ascertain seriousness of injury from staff and any relevant information.

- Implement the appropriate management plan or action strategy

Phase Two – Grade the incident

As soon as practicable, but without unnecessary delay, communication between the Principal and School Board Chairperson is to occur to assess the incident and grade the incident as 'critical'.

- The information should be documented for further reference.

Phase Three – Further High Priority Action by the Principal

- Further ensure the safety of all students, employees, volunteers and visitors.
- Further emergency response may be necessary depending on the progress of the crisis.
- Principal informs the family directly affected where there has been death or serious injury and organises with the family an appropriate manner in which to inform any siblings.
- When there are number of people to contact such as when a student is in a homestay, attempt to simultaneously contact all parties
- Advise the CIMT that a mandatory meeting is required. Specify the time and location of the meeting.
- Inform the Board Chairperson.
- Make contact with suitable agencies that may be required to assist to have them on standby
- The School should also contact ACT Department of Education and inform them of the incident.

Phase Four – Immediate Action by the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

- Management team convene for meeting
- Consider thoughtfully the Crisis Management Plan
- Co-opt other professionals and suitably qualified people as required to be part of the Team
- Assess the situation and consider an appropriate response plan.

This may include:

- Decide what resources are needed e.g.: counsellors, relief staff

- Identify any staff/students at risk or who need to be told separately
- Determine what information will be communicated to staff
- Provide the School Receptionist with necessary information to respond to enquiries
- Organise to prepare facts, attend to visitors, receive phone calls, updates to School Board
- Convene a Staff Briefing for all employees on site
- Ensure all staff are able to function and complete tasks
- Prepare a communications strategy and media release
- Distribute fact sheets and support documentation as necessary
- Encourage confidence in the existing structures and ensure procedures are clearly understood
- Management to ensure that no students are left unsupervised during this time of extraordinary discourse
- At the close of the day call a staff meeting to brief staff before departure

Phase Five (a) – Staff Briefing

- Present a prepared statement, which clearly, concisely and briefly gives the factual information.
- Outline the School’s response and proposed plan of action
- Allow time for staff to ask any questions and to respond
- Describe the staff responsibility in monitoring student and staff welfare and identifying students/staff at risk
- Identify students at risk / extremely upset and help them to feel safe
- Clarify for staff any specific responsibilities that they themselves might have
- Principal advises staff how to deal with any media enquiries

Phase Five (b) – Student Gathering

The Principal may call a School Gathering if necessary. Alternatively, students may be briefed in small groups, such as classroom groups. Staff should be assisted in this process by providing them with a briefing sheet. Students should be assembled in a calm, orderly manner and observe the following:

- Present facts to students clearly and calmly
- Advise the students of the action plan and the next stages
- Allow some reaction time while they briefly talk to friends
- Provide input on common reactions and how to care for self and others
- Inform students of support available and how to access it

Phase Six – Response Tasks that may be implemented as part of the response plan by the CIMT

Other tasks as required, and determined by the CIMT.

- If students have had to be briefed then it is important that a communication to parents be sent home that afternoon.
- Set up a recovery room, or withdrawal room where students and staff may withdraw to if necessary.
- Visit the accident site or critical incident scene
- Contact local clergy and local Principals to advise them of the situation
- Provide updates for the Board Chairman
- Phone absent staff and students' families to advise them
- Provide tissues, drinking water, heaters/fans in designated rooms if required
- Contact support agencies to elicit their help if needed
- Make sure all staff and students are where they should be
- Arrange visits by suitably qualified people to families directly affected by the critical incident
- All staff to be highly visible and accessible to all staff and students
- Provide updated information to all staff preferably by briefing meetings if possible, if not email.
- Monitor staff and be vigilant for indicators of risk or not coping
- The CIMT to meet twice daily at first and less frequently as the crisis abates to review, assess and plan next steps.
- Keep appropriately detailed documentation
- Be aware of any possible longer term effects on the School and student wellbeing e.g. inquests, legal proceedings.
- If the student is in hospital for some time, the School needs to maintain contact with the student and their family.
 - i. Support and assistance for the student and family
 - ii. Depending on the condition of the student, the School could provide school work for the student to enable them to remain in touch with school activities

A special crisis - death

- *The Principal with the School Board Chairman will prepare a communication for the media and for the general community. The Principal is the only person with authority to speak to the media.*
- *In the event of the Principal being absent from the School, the Acting Principal will act in this CIMT role.*
- *The Principal may convene a critical gathering at which all staff and students attend to receive a prepared statement from the Principal.*
- *Suitable smaller group gatherings could be held for those students and staff most seriously affected by the announcement. These gatherings to be facilitated by suitably qualified and experienced practitioners.*
- *The Principal will arrange for a suitable person(s) to visit the home of the family directly affected and any other family as appropriate.*
- *Plan appropriate School involvement in the funeral, in consultation with the family – arrange a liaison person for this task; if necessary arrange the funeral.*
- *Meet with students attending the funeral and provide appropriate information and collect parental permission slips for attendees in the absence of parents.*
- *Arrange for counsellors to be present at the funeral to support staff/students.*
- *Ensure students/staff are monitored for support needed (at School and home).*

Phase Seven – Recovery, Closure, Follow-up and Evaluation

- Coordinate appropriate commemorations, which may include: plaques, gardens and tree planting
- Organise the time and ritual closure of the Critical Incident Response and return to normal routine
- Formally declare closure at daily briefing with staff
- Staff to take a special role in restoring the School to regular routine as quickly as possible
- Remind all staff to maintain a vigilant watching brief of students who may still be suffering and report students to the Principal
- Set up a debriefing for the CIMT by a skilled and experienced counsellor who is not a member of the team
- Invite guest speakers, if appropriate, to help the community come to terms with what has happened
- Acknowledge the offers of support and the assistance provided throughout the Crisis, for example, writing letters of thanks
- Document and evaluate the process and make necessary changes to the Critical Incident Management Plan

- In-service staff on the results of evaluations and make the necessary changes to the Critical Incident Management Plan

Management Plan

- Modify structures and procedures and arrange for further training where necessary
- Encourage the School community to return to normal routine
- Communication to community as closure
- If a number of students were involved in the incident, after 3-4 weeks, the School should convene a meeting of their parents with professionals present including the Principal, appropriate senior staff and counsellors.
- Encourage staff to be alert to signs of significant, persistent changes in behaviour of those affected in the incident.
- Monitor the mental and physical health of staff and students in caregiver roles.

Approved by:	Date:	Next Review Date:
Principal	07/08/2020	07/08/2022