



What is a critical incident?

A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of that school.

A critical incident is managed best when:

- Quick and efficient action ensures it does not escalate into a crisis
- The impact on the school community is kept to a minimum
- The dangers have been anticipated and action planned to manage it
- The Critical Incident Management Team is in control of the situation
- A complete emergency contact list is maintained and is readily available

Incidents may be personnel related (e.g. injury, illness, accident, both on school premises or on a school-arranged trip away from school premises), or premises related (e.g. material damage through fire, collapse, adverse weather, criminal or accidental damage). It is important to deal quickly and efficiently with the practicalities of an incident, and also to recognise the traumatic effect that it can have on the people involved, both children and adults.

Prevention

The Health & Safety policy, Risk Assessment Procedures, A Combined Equality Scheme and a Health care Plan are systematically reviewed to aid in the prevention of critical incidents. However, procedures are in place to deal with unforeseen circumstances.

Visits

- School visits are carefully planned and risk assessments taken.
- Risk assessments are reviewed by Headteacher and a sample of the forms are kept each year.
- Only reliable transport operators are used and all children wear seatbelts.
- A list of children and adults engaged in any activity away from school are kept.
- A complete set of contact details for each class is kept in the school visits folder and given to staff as appropriate.
- The EV Policy and guidelines are adhered to on the Y4 and Y6 residential visit.

Managing a Critical Incident

Experience has shown that schools which have a Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) in place will handle the situation better. They tend to provide the best support to pupils, staff and families and return to normality sooner while continuing to be alert to the vulnerability of all concerned. Norton CEVC Primary School have completed a CIMP which has been shared with staff and governors. The CIMP is updated annually and is included in the 'Grab Bag' in case of an incident.

Critical incidents happen when least expected. When a school is affected by a crisis, all staff have an important role to play in supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of their school community and in maintaining control of the situation in the school.

It is important that staff know that they have a significant role at this time, that they feel valued and that their contribution is acknowledged. It should be recognised that on occasion some members of staff, for various reasons, may not be in a position to take an active role in managing a critical incident.

The effects of a critical incident on a pupil or staff member can be wide-ranging and can impinge upon his or her family particularly if the pupil is close to those at the centre of the crisis or the incident. A critical incident can also impact on the wider community including pupils and staff from other schools.

Potential Incidents

Fire

- The procedures for evacuation will be followed and the emergency services called.
- Procedures for informing parents will be followed.
- The Area manager will be informed and the Properties department contacted to assess the safety of the structure.
- Children will be kept outside or taken to the church or village hall.

Traffic Accident

- Obtain accurate information from the emergency services.
- Procedures to inform parents will be followed.

Intruder

- Any member of Staff will inform the Police
- Evacuate children to a safe place and contact parents from there.

Medical Emergency

- **General** – outbreak of meningitis, salmonella etc.

Headteacher will inform Area Office, medical officer, School Meals Service. Written advice sent to parents on the advice of Medical Officer.

- **Individual** – Assess injury or follow advice in Care Plan and call Ambulance. Then inform parents.

Sudden death

- In the event of a death of a member of staff or a child, the Headteacher or Senior teacher would explain the situation to the children. Parents would be informed by letter. Arrangements would be made for counselling.

Incident on a school trip where a child is injured.

- Residential trip where supervised activities undertaken
- Theme parks
- Day trips to lakes, activity centers, woodland etc

Incident off site where a member of staff leading a trip is injured.

- Follow procedures for injury with a child
- Contact next of kin.

Setting up Systems- Before the Incident

Critical incidents do happen, and it is important that Norton CEVC Primary School has a strategy in place to best respond and manage any traumatic situation should it occur. This strategy should identify the key areas that need to be considered to assist a school in the development of a plan for the management of critical incidents.

At Norton we have developed a strategy which identifies the areas which need to be considered to minimise the impact of critical incidents. The strategy addresses the different actions necessary and the responses required to different types of critical incidents, some of which are stated above, and have clear guidelines in place to react to any school related emergency.

Creating a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

The CIMT will undertake the preparation and planning work, preparing a Critical Incident Management Plan and carrying out the various tasks described in the following paragraphs. It is made up of the Headteacher (Lisa Sparkes), Chair of Governors (Paul Marshall), Deputy Headteacher (Peter Mabbitt) and Office Manager (Fiona Rapley). There are identified reserves if necessary: Rebecca Mabbitt (Vice Chair), Rebecca Miles (SENCO, Y4 Teacher))

The Critical Incident Management Plan must balance the twin objectives of managing the incident and meeting the needs of the whole school community.

The Plan identifies the key tasks that need to be dealt with at various stages of a critical incident. These are grouped together according to their priority so that the essential tasks are dealt with first and others follow as required.

These key tasks include:

- a school response depending on the nature of the incident;
- essential tasks, contingency arrangements and staff deployment;
- clear lines of communication;
- a resource contact list of external agencies eg education and library boards;
- support for staff and pupils;
- procedures for dealing with the media;
- plans for on-going support; and
- consideration of memorials or commemorations.

Particular attention should be given to:

- how essential telephone lines can be kept clear to receive important messages whilst ensuring that key information is given out;
- staff to receive incoming calls;
- staff to deal with distressed parents by phone/in person;
- use of a prepared statement; and
- how to deal with the media.
- A log of incoming and outgoing calls should be maintained to ensure that duplication is avoided.

The school identified different types of critical incidents and has detailed plans of the procedures to follow in the unfortunate event that this may happen.

The plan is reviewed at least annually by the head teacher and the Chair of Governors.

At least one paper copy of the plan should be kept off site (with Chair of Governors) so it can be accessed even if the buildings are unavailable

When a crisis strikes

IMMEDIATE ACTION (within hours)

When implementing a Critical Incident Management Plan there are a number of immediate key tasks that need to be undertaken. The nature of the incident will determine an appropriate order for these tasks. The following checklist can be adapted for different types of critical incidents.

The key tasks will include:

- responding to any inevitable risk or threat eg evacuation or first aid;
- notifying the emergency services/other relevant authorities and agreed parties;

- mobilising the Critical Incident Management Team;
- agreeing the school routine for that day;
- informing staff;
- establishing a dedicated, telephone line;
- setting-up recovery/designated room;
- informing pupils and parents;
- preparing/adapting a media statement; and
- assessing initial impact of the critical incident on staff and pupils.
- Obtain and collate accurate information about the incident

Although there is the strong urge to begin alerting people and taking action straight away it is most important to gather information which is accurate, at least in outline, before doing so. Planning how to react, keeping a cool head and working through the plan can be calming, even though circumstances may be very difficult. It will also ensure that untoward consequences of ill-considered or rash reactions are avoided. The process of gathering accurate information will be on-going throughout the incident and keeping a record of this will be important.

SHORT TERM (within hours or days)

Hold to normal routine if possible

One of the aspects of a crisis is the anxiety felt by all the people associated with it, including those who have no direct involvement. Normal routine will be kept to as far as possible to ensure some security in the lives of children, in particular, at a time of crisis.

Arrange a debriefing for staff and pupils involved in the incident

A DEBRIEFING MEETING serves a number of important purposes. For example, it may:

- a. Clarify what happened
- b. Allow for a sharing of reactions
- c. Reassure the participants that such reactions are not abnormal
- d. Mobilise resources

During a major trauma, people are often numbed. They feel as if things are not really happening to them. For a few days after the event they are often in a state of shock. Thereafter, upset as they may be, it is important that someone helps them to begin to make sense of what actually happened. Debriefing is a way of talking about not only what happened, but of sharing the often frightening emotional reactions to the events. By holding a debriefing meeting in the school, usually led by an experienced person from outside, the school is giving the pupils and staff permission to exchange their reactions and educating them in how best to cope in the period that follows. A separate debriefing meeting may be necessary for staff who are directly affected by the crisis

Release a more detailed press statement

Having worked with the media initially it is a helpful process for both school and the media to provide more up to date and detailed information as it emerges. This will be appreciated, will help to keep others informed and possibly reduce the number of enquiries. The County Council's Communications Team can help in this respect.

MEDIUM TERM (within days or weeks)

Continue to provide updates on facts

Depending on the circumstances it may be necessary to continue to provide updates for staff, parents and the media for several days or in some situations even longer.

Monitor the effects on pupils and adults and organise support for those needing it

Having developed a support plan, this will be put into action. If other agencies have taken on the task, ensure that it is happening.

Prepare for involvement in funerals, memorial services etc.

There are many different religious and cultural views about the participation of young people in funeral rites. The school will want to respect these views and customs as well as the wishes of parents and the children themselves. The current consensus among mental health professionals is that most children (and adults) come to terms with their grief more quickly if they say farewell formally. Whenever possible, survivors should be encouraged and enabled to attend the funerals of those who died, and the parents of those who died should be encouraged to allow it.

Prepare strategies for re-entry into school

When attendance at school has been interrupted by a critical incident it is important to prepare for return. This will require briefing for staff and pupils and possibly a modified timetable.

The Learning and Improvement Service will be able to give advice to schools following an incident and will take referrals on individual cases of absence where the absence is continuing and unauthorised.

LONGER TERM

Continue to be aware of people's state of mind

As things return to normal it is important to continue to be aware of those who are vulnerable and watch out for continuing or emerging symptoms. New staff and staff unfamiliar to vulnerable pupils will be briefed about the situation.

Special assemblies and memorial services

In addition to funerals that families may choose to be private, the school may wish to mark the event with a special assembly or a memorial service. Discussions will be held with staff, governors, parents, pupils and the local community on what form this would take and who would be involved. Planning the ceremony often becomes an important therapeutic act in itself. For many who have been affected by a major incident, a memorial service acts as a way of acknowledging that it is now over. Even so, many staff and pupils may be upset during the service and this will be considered in planning, for example, where it is to be held and if access should be given to the media. Some schools have planted special gardens in memory of pupils or staff members, others have installed seats in the playground in their memory or have commissioned sculptures or paintings.

Prepare for anniversaries

Anniversaries are likely to be sensitive and difficult times. It is wise to prepare together for these. Marking an anniversary with something positive may be more helpful than allowing it to pass without drawing attention to it. The views of parents of any pupils who had been involved in the tragedy, or who had lost their lives, will be taken into account.

Be aware of the effects of legal procedures

Enquiries and court cases etc. can be long drawn out affairs, keeping alive the trauma of the event. School will be aware of these proceedings and the possible effects on those involved.

Provide support as the facts progressively emerge and change

Schools should be aware that the understanding of the event can alter as information emerges. Strong feelings of guilt may develop and support may be needed for these people.

Re-entry following a crisis

When school attendance has been interrupted consideration of return to school should be part of the CIMP. A variety of strategies will be needed depending upon the nature of the crisis and who was involved.

Strategies for re-entry into school could include:

- liaison with other services and agencies where appropriate regarding re-entry: education officials; police; social work; health board; community services; voluntary agencies; press officer
- liaison with parents; governors; parent/teacher association; letters to parents giving full information regarding re-entry
- the teacher visiting a student/s at home or in hospital

- maintaining contact between the home and the school and deciding who is the most appropriate person to do this
- checking what worries the students (siblings; injured) and the parents have about re-entry and making appropriate arrangements e.g. visit to the child's classroom; to the scene of the incident
- consideration of part time attendance and possible adjustments to the curriculum
- adaptations to the building or availability of aids if the child is temporarily or seriously disabled
- check on worries about meeting other children and discussing reactions to questions and comments
- establishing a 'quiet place' in school where the student can go to 'get away from it all' if they become particularly upset
- establishing a parents' room where parents can have private support and basic needs such as refreshments
- ensuring that all staff who will come into contact with the students are aware of the expectations of the students, parents and other staff

Review procedures

In the light of experience school will review procedures and implement any learning from the incident. That information could be shared with the Local Authority as it could contain information that might be useful to other schools/setting.

Review and Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed every two years

Signed:Chair of Governors

Print Name

Date:

Current review date - September 2024

Next review date - September 2026