



# Elwood Primary School No 3942

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## Critical Incident Policy

### PURPOSE

In the event of a critical incident, Elwood Primary School recognises that appropriate infrastructure must be in place to ensure the provision of all necessary support services. This document outlines Elwood Primary School policy, support mechanisms and procedures for managing a critical incident. This policy will ensure that Elwood Primary School has:

- an effective approach in responding to critical incidents as they occur;
- appropriate support and counselling services available to those affected;
- appropriate training and information resources provided to staff.

### BROAD GUIDELINES

The incident may involve loss of life, serious injury or emotional disturbance. The incident may occur in the school environment or outside. It may involve staff, students or those close to them. The network of those involved in a traumatic event can be wide, especially if it directly involves the school. Feelings of grief and loss can continue over long periods of time.

Counselling should be provided for all those who need it. This may include many who do not seem to be closely connected to the event or the individuals involved. The school may be in a position to help grieving families at difficult times, e.g. through the school's participation in the funeral service.

While school should operate as normally as possible, some degree of flexibility should exist.

It is essential that people be given clear, accurate information at all times. It is essential that a Critical Incident Recovery Team be formed to manage the short and long term effects. At Elwood Primary School the Welfare Team acts as the Critical Incident Recovery Team, calling on other key staff as required.

Elwood Primary School staff must call 000 immediately to report any incident threatening life or property and notify the Security Services Unit (SSU) after contacting 000, telephone: (03) 9589 6266. The following action is to be taken as a result of a tragic/traumatic event which involves the school. Incidents vary in complexity. These guidelines provide a framework for action and would not necessarily be followed in all cases. However, the following four principles must be followed:

- provide clear, accurate information;
- describe the actions to be followed;
- provide help for all affected;
- maintain a normal school program as close as possible.

## IMPLEMENTATION

1. Provide clear, accurate information
  - Obtain accurate information.
  - Deal only with substantiated facts. As soon as possible inform staff, especially those most directly involved. Inform close friends and family individually. Allow questions and discussion as they arise. Dispel rumours.
2. Appoint a skilled Critical Incident Recovery Team to assist in the management of the incident.
  - The team may include staff members, psychologists, counsellors, external DET personnel, support agencies etc. The size and composition of the team will be related to the nature of the incident. Distribute names of the Critical Incident Recovery Team members, and inform others of the role of the team.
  - The Critical Incident Recovery Team will be responsible for coordinating and implementing the plan and will need to consider:
    - establishing the facts as soon as possible
    - developing an action plan of short, medium and long term tasks
    - contact with the Department of Education and Training (DET)
    - liaising with external bodies including the media
    - communicating with the whole staff as soon as possible
    - meeting with staff both as a whole and with individuals or groups for debriefing
    - communicating with the student body
    - meeting with students in groups or individually for debriefing
    - contacting parents/guardians
    - short term and long term counselling requirements for groups or individuals

The relevance of each of the above will depend on factors such as the nature and magnitude of the incident, the intensity of the impact on the School community and the number of people affected.

3. Provide information to the community.
  - As soon as possible provide information to the community as to what has happened, and what is being done. Appoint a skilled Critical Incident Critical Incident Recovery Team member to respond to media enquiries. A written press release may be useful. If necessary, protect others from contact with the media. Advice regarding this may be obtained from the DET Emergency Communications Centre and the DET Media Unit.
  - Establish an open line of contact with the family or families directly involved. Provide out of school hours contact if necessary. This could be as simple as circulating the Principal's telephone number. In more complex situations it may mean maintaining telephone contact at the school. Continue contact with the family to identify their

expectations of the school, e.g. student participation in funeral or memorial service.

- Try to identify those most likely to need help, e.g. classmates, teacher, special friends. Some students not directly affected may become distressed.
- Continue to keep staff, students and parents informed especially about what has happened and what the school is doing about it.
- As soon as possible call students together and provide information about what has happened and what the school is doing about it. A follow up letter home may be important.

#### 4. Ensure counselling is available:

- Contact the Regional Office and/or DET if necessary.
- All emergency or criminal activity, in which the safety or well-being of staff or students is at risk, or where there is a threat to property, must be reported immediately to the Department's 24 hour Emergency and Security Services Unit (SSU) after contacting 000, telephone: (03) 9589 6266.
- Provide counselling services for all. Ensure that there are suitable places in which this can take place. Be prepared to modify the timetable and other arrangements so that people are free to make use of available help.
- The class teacher may be the person to whom students first turn for help.
- Children wishing to attend funerals should do so in the company of their parents. Provide meaningful participation for those not actually attending the service.

#### 5. Continuation

- Continue normal routines at school but acknowledge the effect of tragedy on the school community. Be flexible with those in need of help. Be aware that many people may be deeply affected, e.g. an event may cause a person to recall some traumatic event involving them in the past. The anniversary may also be a difficult time.
- Maintain links with the family. The school and family may wish to develop a memorial garden, erect a memorial plaque, or display a photo in a prominent position in the school.
- Be sensitive to staff and student's needs over a period of time.

## Debriefing

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing has three components:

- initial discussion about feelings and an assessment of the intensity of the stress responses
- detailed discussion of signs and symptoms of stress responses
- closing stage - provides overview and information with referral to an outside agency if required

The Critical Incident Critical Incident Recovery Team will assist the Principal to facilitate the

recovery of staff and students and those of the School community affected by the critical incident.

The debriefing meeting of the Critical Incident Recovery Team should include a mental health professional and one peer who were not involved in the incident. The Team will decide the structure and composition of debriefing meetings; such meetings should be held within eight hours of the critical incident. These meetings will review the impressions and reactions of the persons involved during or following the incident.

Counselling support and referrals for students and their families will be provided initially by the Principal or their nominee and a Regional Guidance Officer.

## Review

The Critical Incident Recovery Team will meet to review the implementation of the Critical Incident Recovery Plan within seventy two (72) hours of the critical incident. As part of the Critical Incident Recovery Plan, the Principal will set up a Critical Incident Recovery Team at the beginning of each year. The Principal will convene the Critical Incident Recovery Team once each semester to review planning and strategies for the Critical Incident Recovery Plan.

## LINKAGES TO OTHER POLICIES

DET Emergency Management Planning

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/pages/mgtplanning.aspx>

## RESOURCES

1. DET's Managing School Emergencies - Minimising the impact of trauma on staff and students  
Managing School Emergencies Booklet.pdf

## POLICY HISTORY

Version Approval Date:	Summary of changes:	Next Review:
March, 2017	Policy Created, council approved	3 year cycle or as needed