

CRITICAL AND TRAUMATIC INCIDENTS POLICY



PURPOSE

This policy is to ensure prompt and expert response by Seaholme Primary School to all school emergencies and incidents that occur during school hours or at school events.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all critical and/or traumatic incidents that occur at our school, and/or at any offsite locations involving Seaholme Primary School students and staff and may include:

- camps, excursions or outdoor adventure activities
- travel to or from school
- non-school hours

DEFINITIONS

A critical 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.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

RESPONDING TO A TRAUMATIC OR CRITICAL INCIDENT IN WHICH THE SCHOOL IS INVOLVED

Note: The School may become directly or indirectly involved in a tragic or traumatic event. (Please refer to the school's **Emergency Management Plan** for additional information)

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 an Emergency Management Team be formed to manage the short and long term effects.

Note: Prompt incident notification enables Security Services Unit staff at the coordination centre to provide support and advice to schools. This helps to resolve emergencies quickly while minimising the risk to personal safety. Critical incidents vary in complexity. These guidelines provide a framework for action and would not necessarily be followed in all cases.

The following 4 principles must be followed:

1. **provide clear, accurate information**
2. **describe the actions to be followed**
3. **provide help for all affected**
4. **maintain a normal school program as close as possible**

Reportable incidents:

As a general rule, a serious incident is one that requires medical attention or a police investigation.

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Examples of reportable incidents involving schools include:

- motor vehicle collision and/or all WorkCover incidents
- impact by machinery, equipment, aircraft
- fatalities
- [fire on school grounds, bush or grass fire](#)
- incidents of death or serious injury (injury requiring medical attention)
- incidents resulting in:
 - closure or significant damage to parts of a building or its contents and/or a threat to health and safety
 - [bomb threat](#)
 - outbreak or incidence of disease, such as flu or COVID pandemic
 - presence of toxic fumes or explosive conditions
 - finding hazardous material on school site including explosives, fog signals, detonators, gun powder, cords and fuses, blasting cartridges, incendiary devices, marine distress signals, propellant powders etc
 - fumes, spill, leak or contamination by hazardous material
 - flood, windstorm, earthquake or other natural disasters
 - criminal activity such as suspicious person/s and/or vehicles, vandalism, burglary, graffiti, theft, fraud, property damage
 - neighbourhood complaint
 - missing/disappearance/removal of student/s including:
 - o unauthorised/unexplained absenteeism from school
 - o unauthorised absenteeism resulting in a missing persons report
 - firearms, weapons or bomb threat
 - behaviour of a student, visitor or staff member that could lead to potential risk to someone else
 - serious threats made against a person
 - siege or hostage situation
 - need for evacuation or lockdown
 - unethical staff behaviour particularly if it involves taking advantage of a student, visitor or staff member
 - issues of negligence or legal liability
 - near misses: incidents that very nearly lead to injury or death
- **Example:** Hazardous condition observed/near misses.
- an event with a major impact on school operations or the potential to:
 - o involve the relevant Minister
 - o subject the Department to high levels of public or legal scrutiny.

[Further guidelines:](#)

1. Obtain accurate information. Deal only with substantiated facts.
2. 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.
3. The Emergency Management Team assists 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 Emergency Management Team members and inform others of the role of the team.
4. As soon as possible provide information to the community as to what has happened, and what is being done.

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5. Appoint an Emergency Management Team member to respond to media enquiries (where applicable). 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.
6. Establish an open line of contact with the family or families directly involved.
7. 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.
8. Continue contact with the family to identify their expectations of the school, e.g. student participation in funeral or memorial service.
9. Try to identify those most likely to need help, e.g. classmates, teacher, special friends. Some students not directly affected may become distressed.
10. Ensure that counselling help 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 Management Branch on **(03) 9589 6266**.
11. Continue to keep staff, students and parents informed, especially about what has happened and what the school is doing about it.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. The class teacher may be the person to whom students first turn for help.
15. Children wishing to attend funerals should do so in the company of their parents. Provide meaningful participation for those not actually attending the service.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. Be sensitive to staff and student's needs over a period of time.

Important: Schools shouldn't handle any explosives found at school. However, if it's necessary to remove explosives from a student's possession avoid bumping, striking or dropping the object. Place the object gently in an isolated position, ensure it is not exposed to any form of heat/ignition and wait for the police.

Note: Schools should also report any nuisance activity which may not have led to damage but could lead to crime at a future time. This information is used to implement proactive security measures such as targeted security patrols, temporary surveillance and intruder detection systems to prevent criminal activity.

Bomb Threats

1. call police on 000
2. notify the Security Services Unit on 03 9589 6266
3. implement the school's emergency management plan

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4. do not search for the bomb
5. do not allow a search by students or staff
6. do not impede an explosives inspector from entering school premises

Note: an inspector of explosives may interview students at school on the same basis as a police interview.

Reporting fires

All fires, including those that have been extinguished and regardless of their size, must be reported to the relevant fire service for the particular locality by contacting 000 and the Security Services Unit.

Helicopter landings in schools in an emergency

The Department has given a general authorisation for the use of school grounds as helicopter landing sites during emergencies for the: air ambulance, fire reconnaissance or crime prevention.

The urgent nature of an emergency may preclude advance notification. The pilot is responsible for ensuring that the:

- area chosen for landing is suitable
- safety of those on the ground is not compromised.

If a landing occurs during school time, students must remain at a safe distance, clear of the departure, and approach paths.

The Department has not given approval for media, commercially or privately operated helicopters to use school grounds. They must obtain permission from the principal before landing.

Note: If the principal or school council consider helicopter arrivals or departures from the school grounds for non-emergency purposes there are stringent requirements for the safety of spectators and protection of the environment. Schools must contact the Aviation Branch of the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure and Transport and the State Environment Protection Authority. See: [Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure and Transport](#) and [Environment Protection Authority](#).

Criminal offence and insurance reporting

In the case of a loss arising from a criminal offence, the principal should:

- report the matter to the President of the school council
- take steps to determine the extent of the crime i.e. burglary, theft, fire/arson, vandalism, significant graffiti and details of make, model and serial numbers of any missing equipment
- complete a Criminal Offence and Insurance Report and email it to the [Infrastructure Division](#)
- take steps to avoid the possibility of further loss strengthening internal control procedures and security measures.

Regional Office and the Student Critical Incident Advisory Unit will be contacted as per the requirements of the response to the specific critical incident.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Related School Policies and Documents

- Duty of Care Policy
- First Aid Policy
- Anaphylaxis Policy
- Emergency Management Plan including Critical Incident Recovery Plan (CIRP), and templates

Related DET Resources

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- [DET Emergency Management Planning](#)
 - [Emergency and Critical Incident](#)

EVALUATION AND REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually as part of School Council responsibilities, and/or in response to any critical or traumatic incident, following analysis of school data on reported incidents; and/or as part of the school's review cycle; and/or if circumstances and regulations change.