



Critical Incident Policy

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1. Definition of Terms

In this document, the generic term 'emergency' is used to include both an emergency and a critical incident. Some incidents can be serious or beyond the ability of the onsite activity leaders and senior leaders to cope, and thus require support from available emergency services.

By their nature, emergencies are usually unexpected and can therefore be stressful. However, training and careful pre-planning of what to do beforehand can mitigate the trauma of being caught up in one.

An emergency is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school. (NEPS, 2016)

Emergencies are sudden, unexpected and unpredictable. They fall outside the range of normal experiences, potentially affecting a large number of people and causing high levels of personal distress. They vary in nature and location and may cause disruption to the school day. A critical incident affecting school may include (but is not limited to):

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden accident, murder, terminal illness or suicide.
- Serious accident involving students or staff members on or off the school premises.
- An event witnessed outside of school (such as a serious accident or assault).
- A significant event in the community, e.g. terrorist incident or transport accident.
- Fire, flood or damage to the building caused by adverse weather or failure of school systems.
- Serious illness amongst the school community e.g. Outbreak of Meningitis, Covid.

2. Preparation for Dealing with a Critical Incident

The serious nature of an emergency means that staff may also experience anxiety and distress as well as students. However, training, preparation and a clear set of protocols give some guidance and security to staff who may well be in the front line of dealing with an incident, even before the emergency responders arrive. Preparation may take the following forms;

- **Planning** - Working proactively, assisting with critical incident planning and reviewing the School's support plan and providing advice and training.
- **Assessment and Identification** - Supporting staff to assess the likely impact of the incident on the school community, prioritise actions and help in the identification of vulnerable students and staff, school resources and cultural or religious implications surrounding the incident and how they may be addressed.
- **Information and Support** - Advice/support to the Principal/Senior Management Team, advice/support to staff members around supporting pupils and attending parent meetings arranged by the school to brief them on the possible reactions/symptoms following a traumatic event.
- **Signposting** - Signposting to additional resources and support services as appropriate.

In the event of a critical incident, key personnel will need to act promptly in implementing critical incident procedures. This may include responding to any immediate risk or threat (For example, evacuation or first aid), notifying emergency services, mobilising key staff members in the contingency plan and notifying the parents/carers of any students involved.

Critical incidents may be divided into those occurring on the school site and those that occur off-site, usually on educational visits.

3. Incidents Occurring Off-Site

- Before a visit, the emergency procedures should be reviewed and the Activity Team reminded about procedures in accordance with emergency protocols.
- All risk assessments should be placed in the travel pack in hard copy as well as being placed on school's online systems.
- All Activity Team members should have easy access to a copy of the emergency procedures throughout the activity and be able to act if there is a problem. As well as being published on the school website, a copy of the procedures is kept in the school admin office and the visit pack includes a copy for all the activity team members.
- Before the visit, a chain of command should be established between all of the activity team, designating a Team Leader, a Designated Contact Officer who will liaise with the school during the emergency, and a clear understanding of who will take over as Team Leader should he/she be incapacitated during the emergency. As every visit and location is different, this should occur every time students are off-site.
- All emergency procedures need to be in hard copy as the nature or location of the incident may preclude the use of mobile phones or handheld devices. During a critical incident, the mobile phone network is often overwhelmed by calls and therefore is not reliable.
- Team Leaders should be aware of potential hazards in advance of the visit and the risk assessment should address these potential hazards, particularly in the case of changes in weather in remote regions, which can happen very quickly.
- Team Leaders should be familiar with how emergency responses operate abroad in the country being visited.
- It is mandatory that all daily itineraries are logged with the school, hotel, responsible tour companies etc and that these itineraries are adhered to without deviation, especially abroad where language differences may be an issue or where geographical natural hazards may be unfamiliar or of sudden origin.
- All existing plans for a visit should include a second contingency plan suggest in case something goes wrong (e.g. a volcanic eruption in Iceland meaning a venue is closed). When leaving an itinerary with school, hotel, responsible tour company etc, the contingency plan should also be logged. If the school changes plan they must inform the company of the changes.

4. Training and Practice

- During an emergency there will be no time to read the guidance – staff will be reliant on training and effective practised systems.
- Emergency procedures should be regularly reviewed, and all members of a team should be able to deal with an incident, including how to alert the emergency services in the area of the visit, and how to inform the school if mobile coverage is not available or disabled. Once the school is informed, they will inform the parents. There will be a designated staff member with responsibility for communication with the school, allowing other staff to deal with the emergency.
- Communications can become swamped during an emergency, particularly if parents/media are trying to call for news.
- Ensure mobile phones have enough credit and are charged.
- Check whether there is mobile coverage from your provider in the area of your visit if remote.

- Ensure that there is an appropriate level of first aid cover for the nature of the visit and ensure that activity first aid kits are appropriately stocked and accessible.
- Ensure that all individual medical needs are known and that leaders carry such information with them. These should be on the individual Risk Assessments.
- All Activity Team members are registered First Aiders and undertake re-training every three years. They will administer first aid until the arrival of the emergency services.

5. During the Incident

Immediate Action

- Senior activity leaders should take charge of an incident until relieved by the emergency services.
- If a Senior Activity Leader is incapacitated or unavailable, another activity leader should be able to take charge and to at least initiate these emergency procedures.

Leaders should:

1. Assess the situation, establishing the nature and extent of the problem but ensuring that you do not put yourself or others at further risk.
2. Make sure all members of the group are:
 - accounted for. A register should be called for Staff, Volunteers and Students.
 - safe.
 - adequately supervised.
 - all students should be given a detailed briefing as soon as possible so that they are aware of how to remain safe and what will happen.
 - team members will administer first aid if necessary until the emergency services arrive.
 - team leaders will accompany the injured to hospital if necessary.
 - members of the activity team will remain with those not required to go to hospital, under the direction of the emergency services and until safely evacuated and returned to a place of safety (school, evacuation centre, parents collection, depending on the circumstances of the incident.)
 - the school must be notified by the Designated Contact Officer (an elected member of the Activity Team). The admin team at school will notify parents and the Local Authority, whilst the activity team deal with the incident at its location.

5. Lost Children

This is defined as children that are missing on a visit or off-site activity.

If a child goes missing from a school visit or off-site activity, where parents are not attending and responsible for their own child, the school ensures that there is a procedure that is followed.

- As soon as it is noticed that a child is missing, the team leader asks children to stand with their designated group leader / teacher who takes a group register to ensure that all other children are accounted for.
- Members of staff then search the immediate vicinity but do not search beyond that.
- The staff must contact the venue staff as soon as possible, who will assist in the search. If the venue has a lost child procedure in place (e.g. museum, zoo, playing fields etc.) this should be followed.

- If the child is not located, the Principal, Deputy Head and Designated Safeguarding Lead are informed by the designated Contact Officer. Other staff will be informed as necessary.
- The Principal will decide whether to:
 - delay the visit or activity for a reasonable time.
 - halt the visit or activity.
 - let the group carry on with their arrangements and take over responsibility for finding the missing child.
 - If the group continues with their off-site visit or activity, the Contact Officer will keep in contact with the Principal to update them of the situation.
 - If the situation becomes a Critical Incident, then the Critical Incident Policy is followed.
 - The police are contacted by phone and the child is reported as missing.
 - The Principal contacts the parents as soon as possible.
 - A member of the Senior Leadership Team may be sent to the venue to support the group and be the point of contact for the police.
 - The child's parents are informed by the Principal and advised on whether to travel to school or to the venue.
 - While an assistant visit leader arranges to take the remaining children back to school with some staff, the visit leader and any available staff may stay at the location to assist in the search.

The Investigation

For missing children, the Critical Incident Policy will be followed as part of the investigation, detailing among other notes:

- the date and time of the incident.
- when the child was last seen in the group / visit.
- the estimated time that the child went missing.
- a description of the student – physical features / clothing and age.
- what staff / children were in the group or visit.
- what has taken place in the group / visit since then.
- Confidential information e.g. photograph, mobile number of the student, medical information may be request by the police as part of their investigation. The school will provide the information to the police via an encrypted email. The Activity Team will not be in possession of this information as it contravenes safeguarding policy.
- In time, the Vice-Principal will carry out a full investigation taking written statements from all staff present at the time in school, on the school visit or at the activity venue.
- A conclusion is drawn as to why the incident happened.
- If the incident warrants a police investigation all staff must co-operate fully. In this case, the police will handle all aspects of the investigation, including the interviewing of staff.
- Social Services may be involved if it seems likely that there is a serious safeguarding issue to address.
- The incident is reported under RIDDOR agreements and is recorded in the Incident Log as well as on MyConcern. The local authority health and safety officer may want to investigate and will decide if there is a case for prosecution.
- After the review, suggested updates to procedures will be discussed and implemented as necessary.

6. Evacuation of School for any Reason

Evacuation of the school is defined as the removal to a place of safety, of all students, staff, visitors, contractors, parents or any other persons on the site at the time of evacuation.

Reasons for evacuation could include, but is not exclusive to;

- Fire.
- Chemical hazards likely to endanger health.
- Water leak.
- Failure of electrical supply.
- Failure of heating.
- Contamination of the water supply.
- Severe blockage to sewage system.
- Severe weather conditions (very heavy snow, blizzard, flooding from river or saturation flooding etc).
- Infestation (rats, cockroach, fleas) requiring specialist deep cleaning.
- Danger from collapse of building.
- Explosion.
- Workplace violence.
- Terrorist attack (see Starburst, Sardines or Snuggledown).
- Bomb Threat.
- Hoax calls.

7. Fire Drill and Evacuation Procedures

Wemms Education Centre has a robust and well practiced evacuation procedure in case of fire, details of which are outlined in the Health and Safety Plan.

- The Fire Drill and Evacuation procedure is practised monthly.
- Details of escape routes and how to evacuate safely are displayed in every classroom and corridor.
- Students and staff are well aware of evacuation routes from every classroom in the school and know how to access the shortest route from each location.
- Students and staff know the procedures; leave belongings, walk do not run, remain silent in order to hear instructions, leave the building immediately, proceed to the assembly point on the field, where the register will be taken for each year by specially appointed staff.
- Visitors and Contractors on site during evacuations will be directed by Fire Marshalls and Admin Staff.
- Students and Staff are familiar with the Fire Alarm sound and with the verbal code “Mr Sands asks you to join him on the field” which may be given via Alexa in case of system failure.
- The Fire Drill Evacuation Procedure will be employed for all school evacuations from the site no matter the cause.

8. The Aftermath of an Emergency Responses

Breaking the News to School Staff

Where possible, school staff should be informed first, ideally in a group where questions can be asked and all staff receive the same information. Even if staff are aware of the incident, Wemms Education Centre considers it advisable to hold a meeting to clarify information and ensure staff are aware of the school position, response and are signposted to further support – this helps to avoid rumour and conjecture. The School is mindful of also informing staff members and adults who may not be present at the initial meeting (for example, part-time staff, etc.) Face to face meetings also ensure that facts are correct; in the days of social media sometimes rumour is rife and based on little but hearsay.

Breaking the News to Students

Breaking the news to children and young people can be a difficult task but also presents an opportunity to be clear about the facts that are known and to emphasise the strengths within the school community. The Educational Psychology Service can provide support and advice on sharing information about a traumatic event with students of different ages and with additional and special educational needs, based on the specific circumstances involved.

It is important to inform students of a critical incident as soon as possible, ideally in small groups ensuring a safe space for expression and open discussion. Where possible, school staff should make the announcement in small groups simultaneously. School staff also need to be mindful that information may already be circulating on social media and therefore it may be necessary to address rumours or misconceptions. The following should also be considered when breaking the news to students:

Who should tell the students?

- Someone who they know and trust.
- Someone who can maintain contact with the child in the time ahead.
- Someone who has an understanding of how children respond to trauma.
- Someone who allows the child to express their feelings.
- Someone who is confident speaking to the group.
- Someone who respects children's confidentiality.
- Staff should be able to decline this task if they do not feel able.

Where should they be told?

- In a familiar setting with safe and comfortable surroundings.
- If a child is being told on an individual basis, ensure this is a private setting.
- When informing groups of students, a classroom may be more appropriate than a large hall.
- If appropriate, a whole school assembly can be held to demonstrate the sense of shared trauma/loss within the school community, but possibly not in the immediate aftermath.

How should the news be given?

- The language and terminology used should be clear and accurate, taking account of the students' needs and backgrounds. Euphemisms such as "lost" should be avoided as it may/might confuse younger children and our students with SEND.
- Begin by preparing the students for some very difficult/sad news.
- Provide factual and consistent information to all students.
- If the news is broken in individual or small groups, the adult should provide opportunities for the students to show emotional responses, ask questions and talk through what they have heard.
- If the news is being shared in larger groups or as whole school, the school will ensure students have an opportunity for questions and discussions in smaller groups afterwards.

- The school will endeavour to give expression to the emotions that individuals may be experiencing (for example, shock/disbelief) and explain that strong and difficult feelings are a normal part of the process of coming to terms with this sort of experience.
- Staff will ensure opportunities for the adult to establish the student or students have understood the news they have been given.
- Wemms Education Centre undertakes to inform students what arrangements the school has in hand for coming to terms with what has happened, including the offer of professional support- for example bereavement counselling.
- Students will be briefed to ensure that they understand what to do to remain safe.
- Students will be given an opportunity to do something practical or helpful; write a card, make a video, talk to younger students, create a memorial display, plant a tree or flowers in remembrance, draw or create something to mark the event.

9. Dealing with the Media

Critical Incidents and Emergencies are very attractive subject matter for the media and therefore it is essential that staff know how to deal with journalists, newspaper and TV reporters. It is very easy when in shock to answer questions without thought and sometimes without important information. Conjecture and rumour are not helpful in a difficult and potentially dangerous situation. Therefore, it is vital that:

- No staff who are approached by reporters at the entrance to the School site or in the location of a critical incident or on the telephone or on any other form of media, should say anything other than No Comment or there will be a press release shortly.
- When the Principal or the senior members of the School are in possession of the full and accurate facts of the incident, they will compose and release an official statement giving details that may be used in the media. It is vital that, in order to avoid further distress to those impacted by the event, that there is no error or inaccurate information given that can be widely circulated and compound an already difficult situation.
- If there is a police involvement, there may be a legal requirement which could be corrupted by thoughtless comments e.g. if a prosecution is being considered by the police. The School will be guided by advise from the authorities involved.
- Wemms Education Centre undertakes to speak to the relevant Local Authority before releasing any statement to the media.
- Before releasing the statement Wemms Education Centre may take advise from any authority involved and possibly take legal advise if necessary.
- Wemms Education Centre is committed to protecting any member of the community, students, parents or staff, from intrusive questions delivered at a time of shock, distress or grief, when those already in trauma are least able to deal with extra pressure.
- Any dealing with the media should be done by Senior Management only, who will speak on behalf of the School.

10. Related Policies and Documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Educational School Trips Policy
- Critical Incident Procedures
- First Aid Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Administration of Medicine Policy