

# **Procedures for systemic schools in the Diocese of Parramatta**

## **Critical Incident Management**

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## INTRODUCTION

Schools play a unique role in the lives of children. Children spend about one third of their waking hours in school. Also, the school acts as a socialising and stabilising influence on the child's life. Events that happen to groups of children have long ranging effects on school performance, learning, behaviour and relationships.

Occasionally, schools will face a crisis situation that affects the school and the community. These are called "critical incidents". A critical incident can be defined as any situation faced by members of the school community that causes them to experience unusually strong emotions which have the potential to overwhelm their ability to cope, either then or later. They are traumatic, causing emotional turmoil and behavioural changes. The effects of a critical incident can be lasting and depend in part on the extent of support given by caring people in dealing with the experience.

Examples of critical incidents:

- Sudden death of a student or staff member
- Suicide of a student or staff member
- Murder of a student or staff member
- Groups of students and staff who witness sudden death, severe injury or disaster on school premises, whilst travelling to or from school, or on school excursions
- Major vandalism of school property
- Natural or community disaster
- Unusual and unfavourable media attention

Incidents of a critical nature are not those which affect only a small number of people. Those situations involving a small group or individual can be dealt with using strategies and personnel which exist as part of the ordinary pastoral structures of the school.

This booklet is intended to be a resource for the principal and the critical incident management team of each school to assist in the development of a CIM plan at school level and in the management of incidents which occur.

**Part 1** outlines preparation for critical incidents.

**Part 2** is a guide for dealing with the urgent needs which arise at the time of a critical incident.

**Part 3** contains sample documents and supplementary information designed to be of use in the immediate and longer term aftermath of an incident.

The material contained in this booklet is designed for use by school staff. In the event of a critical incident their response will naturally be supplemented by the expertise and resources made available through the Catholic Education Office and local community resources.

Acknowledgment must be given to the contribution of the secondary student support officers of the Parramatta Diocese whose experience and expertise were instrumental in the production of this booklet.

## **PART 1**

### **Preparing your school to cope with a critical incident**

Each school needs to make appropriate preparations for incidents which may occur. A vital element in this preparation is the establishment of an effective and pro-active critical incident management team from among the staff. It is the task of this team to assess the needs of the school in relation to possible incidents, to put in place procedures to respond to incidents and to educate the rest of the school community about these preparations.

#### **The critical incident management team**

It is suggested that the following personnel be included in a secondary school's C.I.M. team (local circumstances may influence the composition of the team in a particular school).

- principal
- assistant principal
- religious education coordinator
- pastoral care coordinator or a nominated year coordinator
- general coordinator
- two nominated classroom teachers
- parent representative
- secondary student support officers (SSSO)

It is suggested that the following personnel be included in a primary school C.I.M. team.

- principal
- assistant principal
- religious education coordinator
- other executive members
- one other nominated teacher.
- parent representative

The team in either case may be supported by other personnel called in at a time of crisis (such as an SSSO, if called in to a primary school by the area administrator).

## **Responsibilities of team members in preparing the school for a critical incident**

CIM teams should allocate responsibilities to particular members as part of developing the school's overall plan for managing critical incidents. These responsibilities may include:

- assessment of the situations which may require emergency action;
- analysis of the requirements of the school to address these situations;
- development of preventative strategies and/or specific plans to respond to situations considered particularly likely to occur at a given school (due to specific circumstances of the site or for other reasons), including allocation of specific responsibilities to staff members;
- arrangement for checking of specific plans by relevant authorities;
- establishment of liaison with all relevant emergency and support services and preparation of contact lists for these services;
- establishment of liaison with the secondary student support officers of the diocese through the school's area administrator;
- familiarisation of staff with the potential incidents identified and the arrangements made by the school to address these situations, including the CIM checklist included in this booklet;
- organisation of trials of evacuation or other management procedures;
- the identification of specific professional development needs related to potential critical incidents (e.g. dealing with the media) and the organisation of staff attendance at appropriate courses; and
- regular review of the school's CIM plan.

\* A very helpful resource for critical incident management teams in schools is *Managing Crises in Schools: A Practical Guide*, Penny Munro and David Wellington, Thomas Nelson publishers, Australia, 1994.

## **Preparing an evacuation plan**

A plan of this sort is intended to facilitate evacuation of the entire school population in the event of fire, bushfire, explosion, bomb threat, gas leak, natural disaster etc. The emphases of the plan are to:

- achieve evacuation in the minimum amount of time; and
- account for all students, staff and visitors;

so the safety of the whole school community may be assured.

Schools in areas of specific risk (e.g. bushfire prone areas) should supplement the basic plan with specific provisions for that risk.

Each school will need to consider the steps listed below in the light of local circumstances. Some steps may not apply in all cases.

### **Steps to take in advance**

- identification of an evacuation route (and an alternative) from each room of the school. Publication of a master plan displaying these routes;
- familiarisation of students with the routes (and alternative routes) relevant to the rooms they use;
- designation of a safe area to assemble after evacuating. Allocation of marshalling points in that area;
- storage of all class rolls together in a central accessible place. Maintenance of accurate absentee and late arrival/early departure records;
- clear allocation of responsibilities, including provision for the absence of key people;
- identify shut off points for electricity and gas services and have these marked on a plan of the school which will be accessible to staff in an emergency situation;
- provide a list of responsibilities to all staff. Familiarise staff with the plan and their part in it;
- have the plan checked by local fire brigade or SES personnel;
- opportunity for rehearsal of the plan (including alternatives).

## Steps in your evacuation plan

- responsibility for assessment of a potential emergency (if not obvious);
- notification of emergency services by a designated person;
- issuing of alarm/signal to evacuate by a designated person;
- assign someone to ensure clear access and meet arriving emergency services;
- procedure for students evacuating rooms:
  - stop work, do not panic.
  - close windows, switch off power
  - leave all non-essential items - do not delay or return for anything
  - follow teacher's instructions to designated exit (or alternative)
  - walk to designated evacuation area
- teachers to supervise movement via designated routes;
- checking buildings. Assign staff to check:
  - toilets
  - sick bay
  - each block/area for stragglers
- assign staff to assist disabled students;
- assign someone to switch off gas and electricity services;
- assign someone to collect rolls to be taken to designated evacuation area;
- assign someone to identify marshalling points at the evacuation area;
- teachers to check rolls to account for all students. Report to designated person;
- make arrangements to check the roll of staff (don't forget canteen staff etc.) and account for all visitors. Report to designated person;
- Responsibility for giving the 'all clear'.

## School community and CEO contact numbers

*(This list, which should include the following people as well as a full listing of all staff, with homeroom teachers identified, forms part of your school-based CIM plan.)*

POSITION / ORGANISATION	NAME	PHONE
Area Administrator .....		
Director of Human Services.....		
Principal .....		
Assistant Principal .....		
REC.....		
Student Support Officer .....		
General Coordinator.....		
Year/Primary Coordinators		
• Year 7/ K-2 .....		
• Year 8/ 3-4 .....		
• Year 9/ 5-6 .....		
• Year 10.....		
• Year 11 .....		
• Year 12.....		
Parish Priest(s) • a. ....		
• b. ....		
P & F President .....		
Regional Schools		
• a.....		
• b.....		
• c.....		
• d.....		

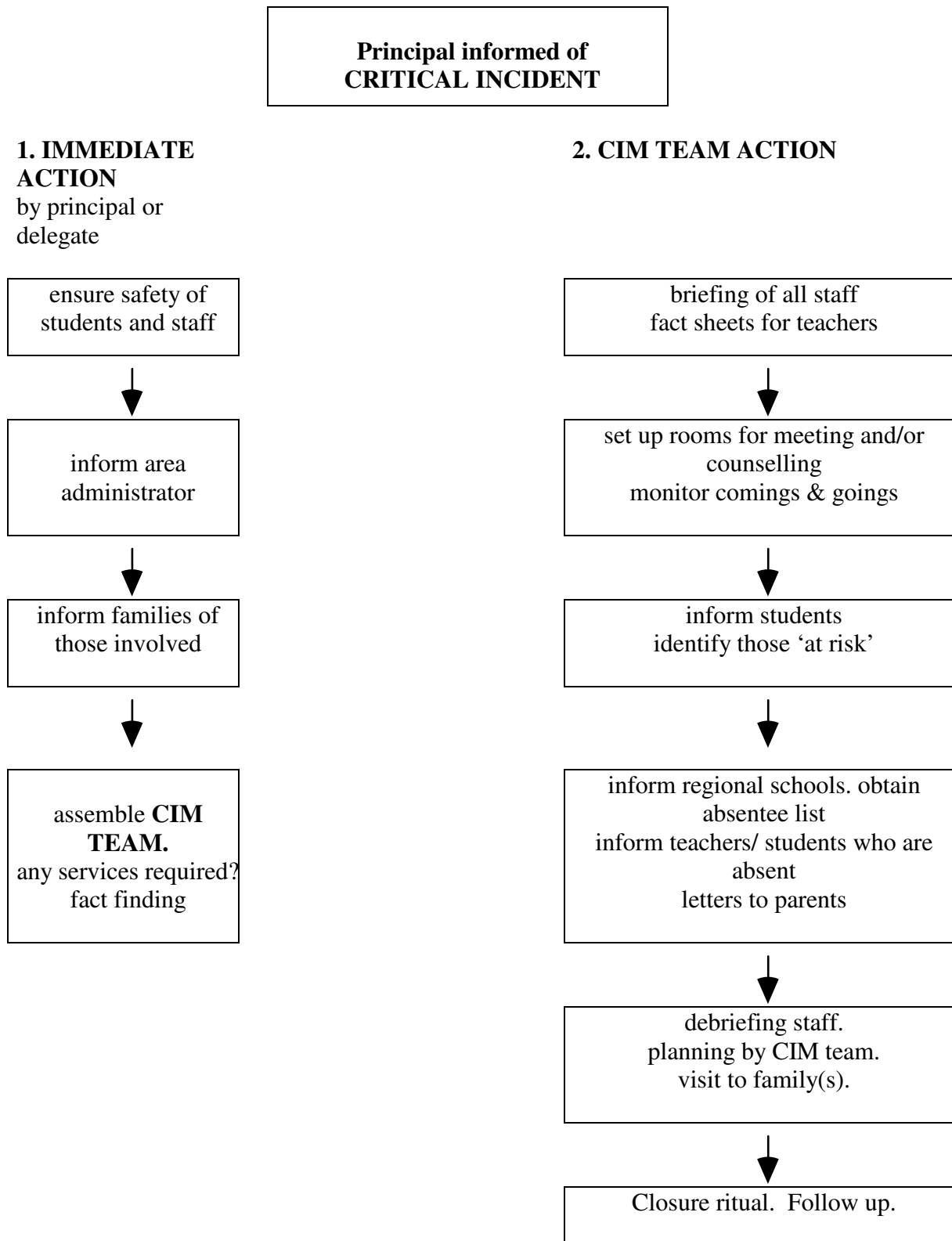


## Emergency contact numbers

ORGANISATION	CONTACT NAME	PHONE
Emergency police/fire/ambulance .....		000.....
Local services:		
• Police.....		
• Fire Brigade.....		
• Bush Fire Brigade .....		
• Ambulance .....		
Local hospital.....		
State Emergency Services .....		
Poisons Information Centre .....		
Department of Community Services (DOCS) - District office.....		
Centacare.....		
Community health centre .....		
Bereavement Care Centre .....		
Grief Support Inc. ....		
Local St Vincent de Paul Conference .....		
Salvation Army - Care Line .....		
Salvation Army - Crisis Centre.....		
NALAG (National Association for Loss and Grief) .....		
.....		

## PART 2

### Immediate response at the time of a critical incident



This is an overview of the process. Please refer to the Checklist for full details.

# CHECKLIST

## PHASE 1

## Person Responsible

- Contact emergency services \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Ensure safety of students and staff  
(take rolls if necessary) \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Inform area administrator  
(or team leader if AA is unavailable),  
who will inform other relevant CEO personnel  
(e.g. Facilities and Planning Division in the event of a wall collapse)\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Inform SSSO (secondary) \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Contact immediate family  
(news of a death should not be given by phone) \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Provide office staff with response to immediate calls\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Direct all police calls to the principal \_\_\_\_\_  
(Receptionist)
  
- Direct all media phone calls to the CEO  
Communication Manager. Direct on site  
(i.e. in person) media inquiries to the principal \_\_\_\_\_  
(Receptionist)
  
- Instruct office staff to gather the school's critical  
incident management team \_\_\_\_\_  
(Office staff)
  
- Find out all facts relevant to the incident \_\_\_\_\_

## **PHASE 2**

- Fax available information on incident to CEO communication manager (update this as appropriate)
- Area administrator will liaise with the communication manager to organise an appropriate response to media phone calls. The communication manager will provide appropriate assistance to the principal in answering on site inquiries
- Contact parish priest
- If students are likely to find out about incident before school at the station or bus stop, send staff member to monitor and normalise responses

## **PHASE 3**

- Organise someone to take parent phone calls
- Prepare fact sheets for teachers and students
- Call all staff, teaching and ancillary, to briefing meeting
- Give homeroom/class teachers the student fact sheet, and guidance in its presentation. Also distribute grief awareness sheet if appropriate
- Ensure all student phone calls are monitored to prevent undue distress to students or parents
- Ascertain the need for relief staff
- Call regional schools to inform them of the incident
- Ensure homeroom/class teacher supplies absentee list to year coordinator / assistant principal so that all students who may be particularly affected (friends, siblings etc) can be informed appropriately
- Call absent staff and absent student's families (as appropriate) to inform them of the incident

#### **PHASE 4**

- Arrange for meeting and counselling rooms
- Identify students who are at risk and/or distressed. Withdraw them and provide debriefing
- Ring parents if a student is likely to arrive home in a distressed state
- Facilitate comings and goings of students and ensure leave slips are available
- Inform subject teachers (secondary), librarians and other relevant staff (primary) of students withdrawn from their class
- Provide tissues, drinking water for counselling rooms
- Write a letter to inform parents of the incident
- Cater to the needs of the visitors to the school

#### **PHASE 5**

- Arrange a visit to the affected family(s) by a member of the school community and a counsellor
- Gather all staff for debriefing.
- Convene meeting of the critical incident management team and counselling team for evaluation of the day and the planning for the following days
- Contact supportive community agencies.

#### **In the event of a death:**

- Plan appropriate school involvement in the funeral in consultation with the family
- If the school is to be involved, appoint a liaison person to work with the family and the undertaker
- Issue parent permission slips for funeral attendance
- Provide information on how to deal with a funeral

#### **PHASE 6**

- Organise time and ritual of closure and return to normal routine. Closure may be as simple as morning tea for the staff, and for the students a gathering after the funeral.
- Organise follow-up grief & loss guest speaker for the school community

## **Answering media questions about a critical incident**

All statements and contact with the media **MUST** be directed through the CEO communication unit and/or school principal.

Contact the CEO Communication Manager (as detailed in the checklist). As far as possible direct telephone media inquiries to the Communication Unit. However, there may be journalists at the school/scene whose inquiries the principal will need to address. In this event it is advisable to designate an area (e.g. the library) for journalists to gather and where media briefings will be held. Staff and student privacy must be respected.

The key to a successful interview with a journalist is thorough preparation. Before taking the interview, you should prepare answers for the questions below.

### **LIKELY MEDIA QUESTIONS**

Questions from the media which the principal will need to answer in a crisis may include:

#### **What has happened?**

Tell the media. Open and honest communication is best. (But always stick to the known facts)

#### **What is the school doing about it?**

Tell them what you are doing in general terms

#### **How does the school feel about the disaster?**

Tell them. In a crisis people are looking for reassurance that the school deeply cares

### **SOME DO's AND DON'Ts IN DEALING WITH THE MEDIA**

- Never speculate about the cause of an accident to the media. Tell them what you know at the time and that you will keep them informed as more information comes to hand.
- Don't cover up in a crisis because the truth will eventually come out. When dealing with the media it is a natural tendency to underestimate the scale of a crisis (casualties/deaths/missing) - but never do it.
- Don't ignore the media or make 'no comment'. You can be assured that the journalist will

publish a story on a crisis. It is important that you have some control. Journalists who travel to a scene are not going to go away empty handed. If you are seen not to cooperate or be interviewed then that is exactly what could be reported. "A tragic accident has happened yet the school is not commenting". This will then lead the journalist to speculate, which is the last thing you would need in this situation.

- During a crisis the media have a legitimate job to do. They will turn against you if you lie or are too slow to answer their questions, which can be interpreted as having something to hide.
- When a crisis has occurred away from the school, or when an incident is of a continuous nature, information about what actually happened often takes several hours to filter in. Disseminate information as it comes to hand. Schedule regular briefings if the crisis continues over an extended period of time. In this event it may be appropriate for the principal, the Executive Director of Schools or the manager of the Communication Unit to be at the crisis scene.
- In the event of a death, do not release the names of the deceased to the media unless the next of kin/parents have been informed and only then if authorised to do so by the area administrator.
- In NSW it is the normal practice for the police to inform the next of kin when a death has occurred. The police may request that the school principal undertake this duty, and it may in many circumstances be more appropriate. The next of kin should never be informed of a death by telephone. At that time you do not know of their situation, surroundings or state of mind.
- Give all media representatives the same information. Inconsistency could be seen as dishonesty. Providing briefings to a group of journalists at once can avert problems in this area.

# PART 3

## Sample documents and supplementary information for use in the aftermath of a critical incident

### Referral Sheet for Critical Incident Model

Date referred: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of student: \_\_\_\_\_

Year and Homeroom: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher making referral: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for referral: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Seen by (name of counsellor): \_\_\_\_\_

Assessment summary: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Assessment of risk:

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Low Risk</i>		<i>Medium Risk</i>		<i>High Risk</i>

#### Student needs to be seen:

1	2	3	4	5
<i>In the future</i>		<i>A.S.A.P.</i> <i>(within the week)</i>		<i>Immediately</i> <i>(within 24 hours)</i>



**Important note:**

The following letters and fact sheets dealing with the death of a student are examples only. Each school CIM team should use these as a guide to writing letters and fact sheets which meet the needs of the situation and reflect the culture of the school community. Appropriate protection of the privacy of bereaved families should be an important priority.

When passing on information to staff, parents or students, err on the side of **caution** in any matters which may have legal implications or be subject to misinterpretation. **For legal reasons, schools are advised to have the wording of such notices checked by either the school's area administrator or (if the AA is not readily available) the Department of Human Services at the CEO.**

**Parent Information Letters**  
**Example A**

Dear Parents,

With this letter your son/daughter will have told you that one of our Year X students, ....., has tragically died. While it appears..... may have taken his/her own life yesterday morning, we are not in a position to be sure of this.

Our heartfelt prayers and thoughts go out to his/her parents, brothers/sisters, and to his/her friends, especially over these days as they struggle with the hurt that his/her death has brought. May they find comfort in our support and in God's love for them.

It is a time of shock for all of us and it would be quite normal that feelings of sadness, anger and even guilt could be experienced at this time. Your son/daughter may wish to share some of his/her feelings or thoughts with you. I would encourage you to be open to this, even if it may be uncomfortable for you. He/she may also wish to talk about the situation among his/her friends. Additional support and counselling is available at the school, for students, their parents and teachers. As well as our own counsellors, we have a number of local priests available along with a team of counsellors from other schools within the diocese. Many have already been helped by the expertise of these people, and I recommend them to you.

Please pray for ....., that he/she will be at peace with God, and for his/her family that they will be strengthened by the God who loves them.

Yours sincerely,  
Principal

## Parent Information Letters

### Example B

Dear Parents,

This week our school community was shocked and saddened by the very tragic death of ..... The suddenness and very nature of his/her death are very difficult for us to comprehend and accept.

I believe it is important that you are informed of the response of the school and of what support is being given to our students in enabling them to work through their many and very different feelings and reactions of this news.

The Catholic Education Office has offered support through the counsellors who are leading a team of support staff at the school for as long as they are needed. These trained counsellors are here to work with both staff and students and their experience and expertise ensure that the appropriate care is given to all who need it.

Since .....day this team has worked with me and other staff at the school, especially in the planning for the return of our students today. All the students were informed of the circumstances of ..... death at roll class this morning and were given the opportunity for follow-up discussion with teachers and counsellors individually and in groups.

Our Year ..... students and a number of teachers then represented the school at the Requiem Mass this afternoon.

Your sons/daughters may want to talk with you about their reactions to this overwhelming tragedy. It is important that they are encouraged to do so freely and honestly. Later we will have a meeting with parents to discuss these events.

At such a difficult time of grief and sadness, as a Catholic school community we turn to our faith for solace and for strength. We share a belief in a loving God who knows and cares for each one of us and who gives us the promise of Eternal Life. It is this belief that enables us to see ..... at peace with God who created him/her and loves him/her.

I ask you to keep in your prayers ..... 's family, in particular his/her sister/brother who is at this school. May they find comfort in our support and in the God who loves them.

To begin a school year in such difficult circumstances is indeed very hard. We will grow through this experience by supporting each other and by responding as a Community of Faith.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.  
Trust in God.”

Yours sincerely,  
Principal

## Student Fact Sheet

(For use by teachers in informing students orally. *Not* for distribution in writing.)

### Example A

Date: .....

Last .....day evening, .....(*date*)....., ....., one of our Year Z students, died tragically.

His/her mother found him/her unconscious on the floor with a tablet bottle nearby. Mrs ..... called an ambulance, but ..... was already dead.

We do not know if s/he meant to harm her/himself, or just made a tragic mistake.

His/her sister/brother, ..... will need our love and support. S/he doesn't need lots of questions, though, because s/he knows no more than we do.

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## Student Fact Sheet

(For use by teachers in informing students orally. *Not* for distribution in writing.)

### Example B

On .....(*date*)..... one of our Year X students were involved in a very serious car accident with his/her family at .....(*location*)..... at approximately .....(*time*).....

..... was killed as a result of the accident. His/her funeral will be held on .....day at ..... Church at ...(*suburb*)..... .

.....'s father is currently in hospital in a serious but stable condition.

It is not helpful at this time for any students to be passing around rumours about the accident, nor making judgements, especially when we do not know the full story.

At this very sad time we can only offer our prayers and support to ..... 's family, especially for the recovery of Mr. ....., and to the people who knew ....., particularly the Year X students.

## Staff Fact Sheet

### Example A

Date: .....

On .....day, .....(date)....., .....(name)....., one of our Year Z students, was involved in a car accident at .....(location)..... at approximately ....(time)..... The car left the road and hit a tree, and ..... died as a result of injuries s/he sustained. It is believed that s/he died almost immediately. ....'s parents and sister (.....school/year/age.....) were in the car. The car was being driven at the time by ..... . ....'s father is currently in hospital with serious injuries, but it is believed that he is out of immediate danger.

On .....day afternoon a meeting of the school Critical Incident Management Team was held to formulate a procedure for dealing with this tragic situation. ....(SSSO)..... has been in frequent contact with the immediate friends of ..... and is available to provide support to any members of the school community who need help at this time.

The funeral will be held at .....(church).....on .....day. Staff, students, parents and friends will be invited to gather at the school after the service if they wish.

At this time we can only offer our prayers and support for the ..... family and for the quick recovery of Mr..... . Our focus now turns to the other students of Year Z and all those in the school community who have been affected by this tragedy. ....(SSSO)... will now explain the involvement of the school in the funeral and the follow-up structures that we have put in place.

# Critical incident management

## A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Some ideas to assist teachers facing the task of informing and supporting students during a critical incident involving the death of a member of the school community

### INFORMING STUDENTS OF A DEATH

Initially the students will be given information about the critical incident in groups by teachers. This is crucial step and is very demanding. If you feel that you cannot do this at the present time, then do not feel any pressure to do so. Simply let someone know so that alternatives can be arranged.

### INFORMATION GIVING: GIVE A SPEECH

Start the session by talking to the students. It would be best to get through all in this box before taking questions or allowing comment. This is negotiable, but if you feel the need for structure, this is a good one. The speech part should go on for about five (5) minutes.

**1. Tell the facts**

Here you tell the students the official information as per the fact sheet. Careful attention to the wording is important. If you are asked for clarification, simply repeat the part of the information that is relevant to the question. It would not be appropriate to be placing interpretations or attributing motives at this point.

**2. Mention some possible responses**

**Feelings:** Sadness, fears, confusion, guilt anger etc.

**Thoughts:** Why?, If only....., What if....?

**Actions:** Crying, loss of focus, irritable, unreasonable, withdrawn

**3. Tell them the plan**

a. After this lesson, normal classes will resume and normal participation is expected **but** if people need to opt out, they should feel free to do so **with permission**

b. Counselling support is available at the school for as long as it will be required. Simply ask to be referred or directed.

Inform students they are doing the right thing if it is **with permission** and is **supervised**

## **ALLOW DISCUSSION, COMMENT AND QUESTIONS**

It is entirely unpredictable what the students will do at this point. If the response is subdued, thoughtful or very weak, let it go and get on with a planned task and monitor reactions.

If students have things to say, the following may guide your responses:

- Acknowledge feelings clearly. No feelings are unacceptable of themselves and tend to be a more positive influence when acknowledged.
- Try to make a response (verbal or non-verbal) to every student statement which has a significant feeling content.
- Take all issues calmly and assertively. Being truthful engenders recovery better than cover-ups.
- Challenge and firmly debunk all rumours that are contrary to the fact sheet or that have the effect of apportioning blame or motives on anyone. Encourage students to do the same.
- Write down the names of students who appear to be experiencing distress and pass the list on to the CIM team immediately after the session.
- If hysteria arises, move quickly to calm upset students or have them accompanied to support personnel for further debriefing. Call someone in rather than lose the battle with hysteria.

## **CONCLUDING / MOVING ON**

As feeling settles, begin to wind up. If it looks like going on without settling, warn that you will be concluding in a few minutes and that those who still need to talk should seek further support as outlined in the plan.

Recap the plan. Restate what will be expected of students next and remind them of the individuality of the grieving now in progress.

Try to have a concrete activity ready should it be the most appropriate thing to do.

## **THE AFTERMATH**

After the initial meeting with students, the process of grieving will continue and may escalate. At this time the teacher role is to provide the ordinary curriculum structure for the vast majority of students who prefer to get on with it. Distressed students need to be referred to more specialist counselling for debriefing. They need to be allowed to seek help within the constraints of teacher-granted permission (eg. permission slip from the teacher who would normally have them). Students should be (as always) supervised in their activities at school.

Any student whom you feel needs follow up should be referred. Giving their name to the CIM team is essential. Directly invite distressed students to seek help. If they do not want to, affirm their decision, but still refer them.

## **Possible student reactions to critical incidents:**

- \* disbelief and shock
- \* crying and sadness
- \* talking
- \* holding
- \* questioning
- \* withdrawing
- \* shaking
- \* loss of appetite
- \* rage
- \* aloneness
- \* covering up feelings
- \* rationalising
- \* guilt
- \* fatigue
- \* self preoccupation
- \* anger
- \* others ?

## **GRIEF AWARENESS**

### **DO's and DON'Ts**

1. **Do** spend time with grieving people  
**Don't** try to do everything for them - be with them
2. **Do** accept their behaviour e.g. screaming, crying, being quiet, laughing  
**Don't** inhibit them. e.g. through lecturing, reasoning, giving advice  
**STOPPING THE BEHAVIOUR DOESN'T STOP THE FEELING**
3. **Do** accept their feelings, even negative feelings. e.g. anger, guilt, self-accusation  
**Don't** stop them through reasoning, pep-talks, lectures  
**FEELINGS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO BE EXPRESSED**
4. **Do** let the grieving person choose their own way of experiencing grief  
**Don't** expect specific behaviours/feelings  
**GRIEF IS INDIVIDUAL**
5. **Do** let grieving people choose how long they grieve  
**Don't** expect stages of grieving  
**GRIEF DOESN'T ALWAYS FOLLOW THE SAME PATTERN**
6. **Do** share your concern with a trusted colleague when anxious about a person's management of grief  
**Don't** try to provide all the answers

### **AFTERWARDS:**

Certain situations such as sporting events, birthdays, the anniversary of the incident itself may awaken distress. The school may need to be prepared to reintroduce additional assistance as required and provide opportunities for inservice and training as required.



## **Information about adolescent and childhood suicide**

Suicide is a major cause of death among 15-19 year olds (but can also occur at earlier ages). It can be prevented in many cases. The following information is offered as a brief guide to teachers in the recognition of possible signs of suicide. More detailed risk assessment information is available to secondary student support officers. Teachers who have reason to believe that a student may be considering suicide should immediately contact their SSSO or principal to gain specialist help.

Danger signs that someone may be considering suicide include:

- a previous suicide attempt;
- verbal threats;
- changes in behaviour (e.g. withdrawal);
- unusual purchases (e.g. weapons, rope);
- giving away personal possessions;
- signs of depression (anxiety, restlessness);
- problems in school (drop in grades, emotional outbursts);
- preoccupation with/themes of death (artwork, essays).

**A person who is considering suicide needs to know that others care.**

### **DO :**

- be direct (talk openly, ask direct questions);
- be a good listener (don't make judgements);
- make time available;
- get help (act quickly) - always take any threat of suicide seriously.

### **DON'T :**

- sidestep the issue;
- keep what you know a secret (do not allow yourself to be sworn to secrecy, do not keep such a promise);
- leave the person alone;
- feel responsible for saving the person (you cannot control another's decisions).

## **Preparation for a funeral**

In the event of the death of a member of the school community, it is a natural expression of the community's faith to be represented at the funeral and, if the family of the person who has died wishes, for the school to participate in appropriate ways in the liturgy. The CIM team should appoint someone to liaise with the family and with those who have responsibility for funeral arrangements.

Students who are to attend a funeral should obtain written permission from their parents (or attend in the company of their parents). They need to be prepared by a member of the CIM team for the emotions they may experience and be forewarned of any aspects of the ceremony which may be disturbing, including even the usual practice of having the coffin present in the church, since many students may never have attended a funeral before. Special features (such as the delivery of a eulogy, the carrying of the coffin by relatives of the dead, the lowering of the coffin into the grave or the procedure followed at a crematorium) should be spoken about in advance.

## **Prayer**

Catholic schools in the Parramatta Diocese strive to be communities of hope which reflect God's love for us and our love for each other. This should be especially true in a time of crisis. The community's shared faith in God, expressed through prayer, is a major source of support at such a time.

### **Some appropriate prayer resources include:**

*Praying Our Goodbyes* , Joyce Rupp OSM, Ave Maria Press, Indiana 1988. (Available from the library of CEO, Parramatta.)

*Prayers for Peace* ISBN 0 281 04265 9

*I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes* B. Bishop, Hallmark.

*Brief Prayers for Australians* ISBN 0 859 10 588 1

*Travelling Together* ISBN 0 86716 120 5

*150 Opening and Closing Prayers* ISBN 0 88489 2417

*Family Prayer Book* ISBN 0 909986 15 0

## **A sample prayer for when someone has died**

Ask everyone to be still and to recall that they are in the presence of God. Suggest they close their eyes.

READING: St Paul's letter to the Romans (8,31-39)

What then can we add? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for all of us, will he not give us everything else along with him?

What can separate us from the love of Christ? Can anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or peril, or the sword?

No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor present things, nor things to come, no power or height or depth, nothing at all will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

Pause

Prayer:

Loving Father,

You love each one of us with a special and unstoppable love.

You have called each one of us into life, and you have great plans for each one of us.

Help us to come to know that love.

We pray for ....., who struggled to find your love for him.

We pray for his mother/father/brothers/sisters and for his friends as they learn to live without him. We ask that you give them your special support and help.

Lastly, we pray for ourselves, that each of us may come to love the life that you have given us, and in living that life to the full, we might come to see your glory.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord.

Amen.

To conclude, let's join together in the words of the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, .....