



**Oakwood Community School**  
**Critical Incident Policy**  
**(Critical Incident Contingency Plan)**

## **INTRODUCTION - What is a Critical Incident?**

A **Critical Incident** may be defined as a single incident or sequence of incidents which

- are sudden and unexpected
- contain real or imagined threats to a person
- overwhelm usual coping mechanisms
- cause severe disruption
- are traumatic to anyone

## **Critical Incidents affecting Oakwood Community School may include:-**

- The death of a pupil(s) or member(s) of staff through sudden accident, murder, terminal illness or suicide.
- A serious accident involving pupils and School personnel on or off School premises.
- A violent attack or violent intrusion onto School premises, e.g. involving an armed intruder or a bomb alert.
- Fire, flood, building collapse or major vandalism in the School.
- A hostage situation.
- A disaster in the community, e.g. transport accident, terrorism.

*The TRAUMA caused by critical incidents challenges individuals mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually.*

## **Critical Incident Contingency Plan**

Although it is not possible to predict when and where a disaster will strike, there is much that the school can do to be prepared should the "worst" happen. Foremost in this is the development of a **Critical Incident Contingency Plan** so that in the event of a disaster, on whatever scale, staff can act quickly to cope with the distress and confusion and begin to regain a sense of control.

The experience of schools which have been involved in a critical incident shows that those which have made some preliminary plans are able to act promptly and cope most effectively with the traumatic consequences of a critical incident. These plans would include suggested actions, roles and responsibilities which can be initiated promptly in the event of a critical incident.

Foremost in this planning is the creation of a **Critical Incident Leadership Team**, based on the Senior Leadership Team but also including staff who are most suited in terms of their personal and practical skills and their availability and reliability. This team should aim to meet annually to review and update the Critical Incident Contingency Plan. The Team will have at least one member whose role it is to coordinate and liaise with the media. This needs to be someone other than the Headteacher as he/she may well be deployed elsewhere.

Oakwood Community School's Critical Incident Contingency Plan includes prepared procedures and responses that can be put into action in the immediate aftermath of a critical incident. It is flexible enough to cope with a wide range of possible incidents which may occur either on or off site.

### **Critical Incident Leadership Team**

In the event of a Critical Incident Oakwood Community School's Critical Incident Leadership Team will convene. This team will be made up of:

#### ***Chair of proprietary board***

#### ***Headteacher***

#### ***Members of the senior leadership team***

They act promptly and be responsible for dealing with the following issues:

- 1) Emergency Services:
  - Check that these have been contacted as necessary.
  - Gathering Information
  - Media interest and involvement
  
- 2) Obtaining accurate information about the incident. Rumours spread quickly and can add to the distress of those involved.
  - What has happened
  - Where and When
  - Extent of injuries, numbers and names
  - Location of injured and uninjured

- 3) Accessing Support – A member of Senior Leadership Team will contact the Senior Educational Psychologist who will initiate the Critical Incident Response Procedure (if appropriate)

### **Informing Staff – Senior Leadership Team will:**

- Ensure all staff are informed promptly of the incident - it may be necessary to convene a short staff meeting.
- Establish procedures for keeping staff up to date with incoming information.
- Agree how and when pupils will be informed.
- Be sensitive to the feelings of staff, particularly those who are closest to the pupils and adults involved in the incident and to those who have had recent personal traumas.

### **Informing the Proprietor / Members of the Board**

The Proprietor will be informed as soon as possible after a major incident (if appropriate). This will be done by the Senior Leadership Team. Informing parents - of children directly involved:

- Parents of children directly involved will be contacted quickly and with sensitivity.
- Consistency and reliability of information is essential. Avoid relying on a chain of communication.
- A room will be set aside for meetings with parents.
  - In the event of an incident involving death or serious injury, particularly off site, the police will often make the first contact with families.

### **If using the telephone:**

- The member of staff making the contact will be fully briefed, recognising that this can be a very stressful task.
- Take careful note of those parents who have been contacted and those who still need to be informed so that duplicate messages are not given.
- Where appropriate offer help with transport arrangements.
- Check that the parents are not on their own.
- Make suggestions for contacting relatives or neighbours as appropriate.

- Inform parents of the telephone number in the School that has been dedicated to receiving enquiries.
- Inform parents how to obtain more information and when they can expect this to be available.
  - Where appropriate and with permission, give the contact numbers of other families involved in the crisis.

### **Informing parents**

Senior Leadership Team.

Wherever possible, parents of all other children in the School will be informed that the school has experienced an incident and that their child may be upset.

#### **Letter to parents:**

A letter to parents will be prepared for distribution as soon as possible which gives:

- brief details of the incident without names;
- an explanation about the involvement of the Educational Psychology Service or other services supporting staff and learners at the school;
- how parents can get more information. (See Appendix iii for example letter).

### **Informing pupils – Senior Leadership**

- Some staff may find it difficult to be involved in the dissemination of information to pupils and the Critical Incident Leadership Team should be sensitive to this.
- Pupils will be told simply and honestly what has happened. This is probably best done in the smallest groups possible - classes, tutor groups or year groups.
- Questions will be answered in a straightforward way, passing on only facts and avoiding speculation.
- Some classes or year groups may be more directly affected by the incident and will benefit from extra consideration, support and sensitive handling of information.
  - ***Siblings and other close relatives of victims will be informed separately and, where possible, in liaison with parents.***

## **Dealing with enquiries**

The School may be inundated with telephone calls. People will need to staff the telephone which can be a stressful task.

- The confidential nature of the task will be emphasised to all telephone operators and clear guidance given on what it is appropriate to say.
- An agreed factual statement prepared by the Headteacher will be available for the telephone operators, which includes reassurance about the action being taken at the School/ incident site.
- Those answering the telephones will keep notes and have them checked against School records so that there is certainty about who has telephoned in and who should still be contacted. This will include media, governors, etc.

## **SUPPORTING PUPILS IN THE EVENT OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT**

### **Pupils need access to clear and concise information**

Staff will stick to the facts and give speculative comments.

Staff will act promptly to dispel rumours and misinformation which can cause unnecessary distress.

Staff will be explicit in acknowledgement of the event (if appropriate).

### **Opportunities for pupils to talk through personal reactions**

If needed a quiet, private place for pupils to go to will be provided.

Pupils will be allowed to express feeling with support from the Therapy Team if required.

Pupils will be helped to realise that grief is a natural and normal reaction to loss.

Children with previous bereavement/ loss/ separation experiences and those with special educational needs will be given extra support if required. Particular regard will be taken to this when dealing with SEMH and related conditions.

Staff will be alert to the possible occurrence of unhelpful grief responses such as anger, bullying and scapegoating – they will act promptly and positively to defuse and deflect such behaviours.

## **Formal grieving**

Opportunities for pupils to write and draw, send cards or flowers, letters of condolence, attend funerals, plant a tree, etc. will be provided. A special assembly or memorial service may be appropriate.

Any differences in cultural, spiritual, religious values will be taken in to account.

## **Establish normal routines**

- The School is the normal place for a child to be and offers security at a time of insecurity.
- Children will look to staff for role models of how to deal with death and crisis.
- Trauma reactions are normal reactions and are best helped in a normal and familiar environment.
- Returning to the normal routine of school life also reinforces a feeling of security.
- Pupils and staff most affected will be encouraged and supported to return to school. Staff will recognise that emotions and feelings may differ from pupil to pupil and take into account specific SEND.
- School is aware that strong feelings and emotions are perfectly normal reactions in the immediate aftermath.

## **SUPPORTING STAFF**

- There will be recognition of the differing needs of each affected individual.
- Key staff are familiar with the School's Critical Incident Contingency Plan. Teachers will need to consider their own feelings related to either the present incident or past experiences, so they can feel comfortable in dealing with children's distress. Some staff may wish to take a less active role in supporting others. This will be monitored by SLT.
- School staff will be briefed to be supportive of each other at this time, eg staff may wish to schedule staff meetings in order to receive further advice on how to support bereaved children.
- All staff will be made be aware of possible delayed reactions, particularly of those actively involved.
- Staff who are co-ordinating the school's response will be supported and scheduled for relief periods.
- Arrangements will be made for staff to see a counsellor or talk with an outside agency/support worker, either singly or as a group (if appropriate).
  - Staff will be permitted to make a personal gesture, such as sending cards/flowers, a letter of condolence, attending the funeral.

## **SUPPORTING PARENTS**

- Parents are likely to look to the School for information, advice and support.
- A room will be prepared with tea/coffee making facilities where parents can congregate. An allocated member of staff will be available to talk to parents and keep them up to date with information as it becomes available.
- Information leaflets about the impact of trauma and sudden death and likely reactions will be sourced if possible and appropriate and distributed to parents.
- Information will be provided about the types of support that are available to them and their children both in school and within their local community.

## **SUPPORT FROM THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE**

The team of Educational Psychologists who respond to the School's request for help in dealing with a Critical Incident will work alongside the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team. This support will aim to help school staff manage and cope, both professionally and personally, with the impact of the incident on the School and local community. It is designed to be flexible and responsive to the School's needs at all times.

### **The team will be offered a range of support including:**

- Advice and help for staff in dealing with distressed pupils, parents and colleagues. Psychological support for those pupils and adults most closely affected by the incident.
- Advice on dealing with the media and other demands made on School staff at this time.
- Advice on issues such as "marking the event" and "getting back to normal".
- Advice on ways to manage the likely short term and long term effects of the incident on individuals, the School and the local community.

## Roles and Responsibilities

Key tasks will be carried out in the event of an incident by the following senior staff:

Headteacher and Senior Leadership will be responsible for many, but not necessarily all of these tasks. Individual tasks will be as follows:

Contacting and liaising with support services, including the emergency services, the Educational Psychology Service, and other local support agencies as appropriate –

- Contacting the Proprietor – **Headteacher**
- Organising and supporting the School office staff – **Headteacher**
- Dealing with the media – **Headteacher**
- Managing those aspects of the School that continue to function normally – **Senior Leadership Team**
- Allocating and staffing rooms for counselling/debriefing/support work, and a meeting room for parents – **Senior Leadership Team**

This Critical Incident Leadership Team will meet annually to review and update the School's Critical Incident Contingency Plan (this will be done alongside the Business Continuity Plan)

School will prepare and maintain up-to-date lists of contact telephone numbers for:

- Pupils' parents/guardians
- Staff (including part time/supply teachers and assistants)
- Governors
- Support Agencies

### Key points:

- All lists will be available for easy access with a contingency for 'off-line' situations
- Lists will be updated in timely manner by the Co-Headteachers
- The Deputy Headteacher will be the key contact for all support services

Also, a line will be kept free for outgoing calls and important incoming calls.

## **School Trips offsite**

- All normal off-site procedures will be in place

## **Planning for an Evacuation:**

- Normal procedures for school evacuation will apply

In the event of a major incident or disaster the emergency services (police, fire, ambulance) will take the Lead role and the Social Services Department have a statutory duty to manage and coordinate the situation