

SCHOOL-BASED CRISIS MANAGEMENT

STAGE 1 INITIAL RESPONSE

Open and continue to maintain a personal log of all factual information received, actions taken and the time and date of these events. This is good practice but is essential for many reasons, including the need to give parents, pupils, staff and the media accurate information and to have an accurate record for further investigations that might take place.

Immediately after a critical incident the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher should gather as much information as possible. This should include:

- Clear details of exactly what happened
- Where and when (date and time the incident occurred)
- Which emergency services have been contacted and, if this has not happened, whether they need to be. Clearly, if the emergency services have not been contact but are required this is an absolute priority
- Whether there is continuing danger and, if the incident occurred off site, what help is required from the school / LA
- The names of those injured and the extent of the injuries
- The current location of those injured with the names and contact numbers of the adults present
- The names and location of any pupils who were involved but not injured with the names and contact numbers of the adults present.

STAGE 2 ASSESS CONTINUING RISK

If there is any continuing risk the priority must be to safeguard the welfare of the children and adults. It is important to ensure that any immediate action to protect people or property does not give rise to any further risk.

STAGE 3 THE CRITICAL INCIDENT SUPPORT TEAM

It is likely that the Headteacher will wish to take charge of events, forming a special Critical Incident Support Team. It is anticipated that schools will have considered the possible composition of such a team in discussions with staff and governors in advance of any critical incident occurring. The composition of the team is open to different permutations depending on the circumstances. The team will not necessarily comprise the senior management team in the school, but might usefully involve representatives of the wider school community, such as office staff and the caretaker.

The following may be amongst the roles considered:

- Liaison with the sites of the incident
- Public information
- Press Liaison
- School Continuity
- Management Support

The team should ideally operate as a group based in the same emergency room where they may readily confer with each other, with the Headteacher directing and coordinating as necessary. It may be that some tasks would be better controlled from elsewhere, in which case a means of intercommunication may be required.

THE EMERGENCY ROOM

The emergency room should be laid out so that operators have clear desk space with telephones. Noise could be a problem if people are too cramped. It should be possible to hold briefing sessions. If appropriate, crucial maps and charts should be on display for all to see.

SUPPORT

Support is available from various sources. In some sorts of emergencies police specialists may become centrally involved with the school. In addition to management support, Ealing Council is able to offer advice on a range of issues including dealing with the media. Support may also be offered from local community and religious groups.

COMMUNICATIONS

The needs of the crisis may place a great strain on existing communication. BT is able to install extra facilities in an emergency (at a cost), and the option now exists to hire mobile telephones. It may be worth considering:

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Information released from the school should be accurate and consistent. It will be helpful if a policy is already in place covering joint arrangements between the Headteacher and the governors for the release of information to parents, general enquiries and the media.

SENSITIVE ISSUES

Special steps may be appropriate for dealing with affected parents. In view of the obvious stress for all parties involved, written notes prepared in advance are helpful. A member of staff who is knowledgeable about the family/ies concerned should ideally undertake the task. Offers of help should be made where possible. A religious leader may be asked to lend support in particular cases. If a large number of families are involved, other sources of assistance should be considered.

TELEPHONE HELP LINE

It may be appropriate to publicly announce a telephone help line. Handling such calls is labour intensive and slow but may be necessary. An alternative is to use a multi-access answer-phone. In this event, messages need to be concise and informative, and not seek to minimise or exaggerate the tragedy.

COUNSELLING

The emergency may bring about long-term trauma for those involved, either directly or indirectly. Council staff can advise on appropriate agencies and procedures if counselling for pupils and/or staff is considered necessary. The Educational Psychology Service can provide critical incident debriefing and can offer guidance to staff on handling pupils under stress.

RECOVERY SCHEDULE

It will be helpful in most cases for a recovery schedule to be agreed at an early stage by the Headteacher with the Critical Incident Support Team. So far as possible, this will establish dates and times of key events. For obvious reasons, it should be as realistic as possible. Included may be times of media briefings, decisions on school closure, a schedule for re-opening, parents' meetings, and times of future conferences by the Critical Incident Support Team. Even though some items may initially be tentative, it will be good for the morale of all involved to feel that recovery is in hand and assured.