

## TRAUMATIC INCIDENT POLICY

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**NB: This policy is primarily for use when addressing serious injury or death. For lockdown procedures and associated responses see the Harrison Tew Emergency Plan folder in principal's office.**

### RATIONALE

A traumatic event in a school, such as a death by suicide, death after an illness, sudden death by motor accident, causes shock and grief in a community - a person's death in a school community can cause great harm to other people if not dealt with swiftly and sensitively.

The response plan should involve all staff and make provision for inclusion of students, parents and support agencies from outside the school, as appropriate. The plan should not depend upon any single person but be able to be implemented by the staff available at the time. It should also avoid placing any particular staff member as solely responsible, but rather promote the co-ordinated responsibility of a team of people who can support each other.

- Many people feel uncomfortable with death and dying
- A plan allows quick reaction and appropriate reaction to a situation.  
There will be no time to develop a plan when an incident occurs

### PURPOSE

1. To ensure that the response is conducted in a manner which is appropriate and in the case of suicide avoids glorifying the suicide victim(s) and minimises sensationalism.
2. A return to normality within the school.
3. A collective process to grieve the losing of a school member in an appropriate and dignified manner.
4. An educational process to help students understand death and dying.
5. Acknowledgement that the management of the situation does not depend on any one person. There is a collective responsibility and response.

**GUIDELINES:** The way an incident is managed is critical to the recovery of the school and reduces the potential for further risk.

1. All staff must understand the traumatic incident response procedure
2. The grieving of all staff and students must be accepted as genuine. The significance of the relationship to the person/s affected is personal to each individual. Sudden death may well trigger grief from previous events in a person's life
3. In the event of a death, both staff and students must be given the opportunity to express their grief. Consideration should be given to the provision of a comforting and reassuring environment, a room or space set aside in the school for remembrance and tributes, with counselling available.

4. A traumatic incidents team needs to manage a crisis plan and oversee the key steps that need to be taken to keep the school functioning as normally as possible through this time
5. Opportunities for students to talk about the event and death must be managed carefully given the age of the young people and the context. Sometimes an extremely emotional response can trigger similar responses in others which are unhelpful
6. Staff will need opportunities to de-brief together depending on the nature of the death and the extent of the response.
7. Maintain normal structures. The resumption of familiar roles and routines as soon as possible following a traumatic event helps to reduce the intensity and duration of difficulties that children, young people and staff can experience following a crisis event. It is important to maintain day-to-day activities and involve children and young people in tasks that use their energies and abilities in meaningful ways.
8. Culturally appropriate and age appropriate responses. Differing cultures can have different perceptions about a traumatic event. Provision of culturally appropriate responses provides supportive contexts for children and young people. Similarly, age appropriate responses allow children and young people to explore the meaning of disaster events and to construct views of the disaster experience in ways that allow the trauma to be acknowledged without it being an overwhelming, defining influence on self-perceptions and interpersonal relationships.
9. Psychological first aid. Those involved during, and immediately after, acute traumatic exposure can experience confusion, disorganization and emotional numbness. Psychological first aid focuses on providing immediate support on the 'here and now' and 'what needs to happen next' for those involved in the management of an incident in order to promote problem-solving and functioning. Interventions support and respect the protocols or 'kawa' of the settings involved
10. Communication: Clear, positive communication acts to reduce uncertainty and fear and prompt positive emotional and physical coping.

## DEFINITION

### TRAUMATIC INCIDENTS

Traumatic incidents in New Zealand schools have been broadly defined as events that:

- cause sudden and/or significant disruption to the operation, or effective operation, of a school and/or community
- have the potential to affect a large number of children and young people and/or staff
- create significant dangers or risks to the physical and emotional wellbeing of children, young people or people within a community
- attract media attention or a public profile for the school as a result of these incidents.

Examples of traumatic incidents may include:

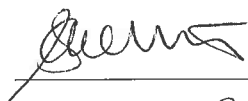
- the death or serious injury of a child or young person, staff member or family/whānau member
- witnessing serious injury or death of a child, young person, staff member or family/whānau members
- threats to the safety of students or staff, including the presence at the school of an individual behaving in a dangerous or threatening manner (see also Harrison Tew documentation).
- a lost or missing child, young person or staff member
- floods, fires, earthquakes or other community crisis or natural disaster (see also Harrison Tew documentation).

Related documentation and information

- Te Pakiaka Tangata: Student Wellbeing: Ministry of Education 2017
- Harrison Tew Emergency Plan – in principal's office

New/Reviewed	Tabled	Adopted
June 2018	27 June 2018	27 June 2018

Shireen Chetty



Date:

26/07/18

Chairperson:

Shireen Chetty

Next review date: \_\_\_\_\_

## PROCEDURES

### A KEY TASKS

#### 1 Crisis Management Team

The Principal and Board of Trustees Chairperson are informed. The Principal verifies the traumatic incident with the appropriate authorities, e.g. Police, Victim Support, Ministry of Education Trauma Response team, and then meets the team of key personnel.

First meeting of Crisis Management team assembled. Looks at immediate acknowledgement by the school of the loss and a willingness to support grief of individuals and institution.

Statement prepared for reading/e-mailing staff and putting on to school website. Based on verified facts and released by police/family:

- Person's name
- Cause of Death if known
- Any other students / community involved
- Confirming that no student at school will be released without parent/guardian prior permission
- Asking for privacy for family at this stage.

Crisis Management team needs to designate an area for meeting where people can come to pass information on and meet regularly during the day, particularly in that first day or two.

Reactive phase to start with proactive input increasing as over time reflection and strategising increases.

#### 2 Family

- (a) Contact of family by principal.
- (b) Establish family wishes, i.e. what information family will allow to be released and what responses from school are appropriate.
- (c) Time spent with family by principal, Learning Advisor, etc as appropriate.
- (d) Representatives of school - staff and students - at funeral service.
- (e) Appropriate message or letter from school to family.

#### 3 Staff

Staff informed. See Emergency Phone Tree with updated Staff Contact details to minimise delay in spreading news to staff.

Staff meetings to explain situation, give support, plan strategy and review progress.

Flag flown at half mast.

Brief statement prepared for website and internal circulation.

Guidance Counsellor to remain in Retreat/Grief area at all times, to be relieved to attend Crisis Management team meetings.

#### 4 Learning Advisor Group

Learning Advisor group support for individual member of the class.

#### 6 Designation of a "safe place" over crisis time, available for anyone in need, e.g. Retreat Room.

#### 7 School

At assembly, a brief address by the principal on the student's contribution to the school.

Look at who will write information to be released at full school assembly or Learning Advisor group.

To balance grieving with school routines.

## 8 Follow-up

Informal Learning Advisor / guidance counsellor monitoring of situation and follow up with friends.

## 9 Outside people available

e.g. agencies are often involved first and they contact the school.

# B PLAN FOR COPING OVER A TRAUMATIC INCIDENT PERIOD

- Co-ordination and communication
- Action plan for teachers
- Working with the students
- Traumatic Incident Closure

## 1 CO-ORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION

(a) Principal informed of event. All members of team contacted. ***If you receive a call regarding a traumatic incident:***

- listen to what has happened
- record the caller's name and phone number
- record the names of others involved and the name of schools affected
- check that appropriate emergency services have been contacted
- inform the caller of any actions you will take (such as informing the Principal, informing the Ministry of Education traumatic incident coordinator by calling the 0800 number)
- give the caller your name and phone number in case they need to call back
- immediately the call is over make contact with the principal/senior management of the affected school and/or the Ministry traumatic incident coordinator through the 0800 service - 0800 TI TEAM (0800 848326).

(b) Crisis Management team make up:

At least two of the senior management team, guidance counsellor, Team leader, Learning Advisor and a teacher to whom the student relates well, e.g. sports coach

(c) Team meets to determine most appropriate approach for the school to take. Important to identify a person who knew the student involved well and can assess the needs and advise how to proceed. It is important to be aware of religious, family, ethnic values which need to be respected.

Discussion on whether or not Group Special Education Traumatic Team should be contacted.

(d) Consultation with family by appropriate team member and decision on what information to be shared by school.

(e) Decision on media - requests to be dealt with by the principal.

(f) Staff meeting as soon as possible to explain situation, respond to questions and plan strategy - principal or deputy principal.

- (g) Contact established with other schools attended by siblings - one of senior management team.
- (h) Decision on meeting or contact with those of deceased's friends. Information on signs of distress etc - Team Leader, Learning Advisor or other teacher/guidance counsellor. Concerns of parents to be fielded by member of SLT/guidance counsellor.
- (i) Check on counsellor availability and resources for back up.
- (j) Community resource professionals identified.
- (k) Retreat rooms identified and set up.

## **2 ACTION PLAN FOR TEACHERS**

### **Morning Staff Meeting**

- (a) Reassurance - many expectations, especially on Learning Advisor, sports coach, course teachers of friends.
- (b) Time needed for teaching staff to express feelings and gain support from each other.
- (c) Updates and current information needed for staff so they can cope with questions and accurate information. Helps counter destructive rumours.
- (d) Written statement giving factual information given to all staff for explaining situation to Learning Advisor groups.
- (e) Staff meeting at end of first day for these purposes. Check on use of "safe" area, Retreat or Trauma Room. Staff to be informed this place is available and manned by someone unobtrusively nearby.

### **Early in Day**

Crisis Management team meet with staff closely involved, with friends and any other staff member who chooses to come - preparation for talking with students to counter feelings of anger, despair, shock, etc.

Also information on discussion about suicide - signs to watch out for amongst students.

## **3 WORKING WITH STUDENTS**

### **Aims**

- Provide support during grief process by providing a safe environment for them to explore feelings.
- Cards/Papers/Felts set up on desk(s) to give students a focus to grieve and communicate their grief. These messages can be given to the family later.
- LA to read and discuss statement with Learning Advisor group. LA groups all informed of "safe" places, i.e. Retreat, and support available in school as well.
- Best friends need to be identified, informed and counselled by guidance counsellor or a well-liked teacher.
- Friends counselled about family's wishes for support and contact, what is appropriate, i.e. card, phone calls, visits, etc.
- School activities continue as normally as possible - gives security;
- Assembly - to draw school together for mutual support;
- Duty at interval and lunchtime - very important that extra staff are around and visible;

- Learning Advisor or member of Crisis Management team could monitor deceased's timetable by checking with course teachers for signs of distress in friends. Guidance counsellor to be available.
- More intensive work with deceased's LA Group:
  - ♦ Considerable time (one period initially with guidance counsellor and LA present) allowed for talking about person, ways of expressing feelings and general support to one another.
  - ♦ Session on understanding grief and accepting feelings of guilt, anger, sadness, etc.
  - ♦ Students need to realise suicide was a choice, but a poor choice, so that deceased is not romanticised or develops as a heroic figure.
  - ♦ A follow up period if staff deem necessary, possibly taken by an outsider.
  - ♦ Funeral - students given opportunity to attend in school uniform if family agree. Emotional time, so as many adults as possible too. Parents could help Learning Advisor to liaise here.
  - ♦ A member of the church or marae or family invited beforehand to explain aspects of the service or protocol - may be unfamiliar.
  - ♦ Students encouraged to send messages to the family, individually or as a class effort, if this is in accordance with family wishes.

#### **4 TRAUMATIC INCIDENT CLOSURE**

FUNERAL – A staff member needs to be in contact with the family, re the funeral arrangements and what they would like the school to do, if anything, e.g. speak at the funeral; form a guard of honour outside the funeral. Students may be given the opportunity to attend in school uniform if family agree. Emotional time, so as many adults as possible too. Parents could help form teacher to liaise here.

The funeral probably sees a lessening of tension because it signifies finality in some ways to students. It is usually now 2-4 days since the event and many structures have been put in place to help the school through.

The emphasis now needs to be a gradual return to normality but an awareness of support for each other's needs.

Aftershock can last for weeks or months. Staff and guidance department need to be aware of this. Others may try the same thing to solve problems if suicide was the cause.

#### **STUDENT'S BELONGINGS**

- Assignments, etc. collected from teachers
- Arrangements made to return to family
- Desks in class re-arranged with students' permission to help bring closure
- Appropriate memorial service to close; Karakia at Assembly, candle lighting, etc.
- Remembering the first year anniversary?

#### **5 REVIEW**

- (a) Once the event has been managed, debrief key staff.
- (b) Review the plan and arrange for the necessary approval for the revised plan.
- (c) Review staff within the management team
- (d) Identify staff training and support needs, especially in case of staff death, and arrange training if necessary.
- (e) Report to staff about the outcome and advise any improvements to the plan.

- (f) Revised plan approved by Board of Trustees.

## **6 TRI-ANNUAL REVIEW**

- (a) Key members of the response team meet to discuss roles.
  - (b) Plan to be reviewed annually.
  - (c) All staff reminded of the plan at the beginning of the year.
  - (d) Staff responsible for media contact are trained.
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## **SPECIFIC TRAUMA RESPONSE ADDITIONS**

### **International Students**

Manager to consult list of International Students.

If necessary, a staff member with appropriate cultural background to be added to the Crisis Management team for translation and cultural sensitivities

If International Student, International Student Manager to organise liaison with host family and contact family overseas in conjunction with the Police. New Zealand Embassy in relevant country to be contacted via the Ministry of External Relations.