

## **Earlscliffe (Sussex Summer Schools Ltd)**

### **DEALING WITH A CRITICAL INCIDENT**

Handling crisis is a normal part of school life. Some incidents, however, are of a more critical and overwhelming character in which staff, pupils and parents may experience acute, even prolonged distress. The following are examples of such incidents:

The sudden death of a pupil or teacher

Fatal road traffic accident

Serious injury on out of school trips

Student suicide

Major arson attacks

Serious fire at the School

Serious criminal offence

It is self evident that a school which has anticipated a major critical incident and laid plans for managing a response is likely to handle the actual event more effectively and confidently. If we all know who will assume key roles, have checklists and procedure in place, contact lists up to the minute, a tested framework for communications; then our response to a crisis will be more assured than even the most intelligent improvisation. This document is designed to encourage and support pre-planning. It is divided into two sections:

1. Preparation
2. Immediate action

#### **1. Preparation**

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) in the first instance will be the members of the SLT.

Teachers responsible for trips away must provide all the information required before leaving the school. This information must be logged with the College Office and comply with the School's relevant policies.

#### **2. Immediate Action**

The staged action plan below takes as an example a serious incident involving a number of children off school premises. It adapts readily to other circumstances. It requires a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) based on the Senior Leadership Team.

Planned Action within hours

- . Obtain and collate information about what has happened
- . Gather and brief the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)
- . Prepare an agreed factual statement; this should also contain information about action being taken.
- . Contact families whose children are involved

- . Make arrangements for informing other parents
- . Inform staff
- . Contact Police, if relevant
- . Inform pupils
- . Encourage people involved to talk – counselling facilities and support will be made available
- . Preparation and support of SLT to deal with the media.

Explanatory notes:

**a) Gather information**

The following information is required:

- . What has happened?
- . Where and when?
- . Name and contact number of an adult at the incident site
- . Extent of injuries, numbers and names
- . Local of injured, name and contact of adult present
- . Location of uninjured, name and contact of adult present
- . What immediate help is required from the School?

The CIMT will also need to know:

- . Who has been informed?
- . What has been said?

**b) Critical Incident Management Team**

Whilst it might seem dramatic to have a Critical Incident Management Team prepared, it does ensure that action is effective and efficient. Key people then know what to do and can check that the necessary steps are taken.

**c) Contacts**

There should be a list of the following contact numbers:

- . Pupil lists
- . Staff lists
- . School doctors
- . Health Authority (including JR Emergency)
- . Fire Service
- . Police Service
- . Social Services

If the incident takes place during a school trip, there will be a full list of pupils and staff involved on the trip and a list of contact numbers.

**d) Communications**

A separate dedicated telephone list should be set up to deal with all calls concerning the incident. The dedicated person dealing with the incoming calls will provide an agreed factual statement along with reassurance of action being taken at the incident site. It is important to avoid speculation.

**e) Contact families directly affected**

This will be done quickly and with sensitivity. Each family will be contacted directly, as consistency of information is vital so a chain of communication should not be used.

**f) Inform other parents**

Parents not directly affected by the incident will be contacted by letter; this should give the necessary facts, expression of sympathy/concern and possibly a message for the community. It is important to remember that such a letter is likely to be accessible to the media, so care must be taken in its preparation.

**g) Information for teaching and other staff**

All adults in contact with pupils must be kept well informed and feel secure in handling questions and comments. A schedule for updates will be arranged e.g. during breaks or first thing each morning. Such meetings ensure that knowledge is common and questions answered. Staff should be cautioned about talking to the media or responding to questions from reporters. The SLT must be kept informed.

**h) Inform the Police**

The Police should be informed of the incident. Even if the incident does not directly involve the Police, they may be able to help the School deal with the media.

**i) Information for pupils**

This is best done in small groups in house, with particular care being taken to protect and support both children close to someone involved with the incident and staff who are unable to handle the emotions or distress confidently. The pupils should receive a consistent account of the incident.

**j) Encourage people to talk**

In some instances people involved (pupils and staff) may need to talk about the incident and a counselling service will be available, if required.

**k) Dealing with the media**

The Head Teacher or in their absence the Deputy Head or School Manager will be the designated spokesperson and will make the direct response for the school. In addition, an agreed text should be prepared for release to the media from which anyone confronted by the media can speak.