

WHITLEY BAY HIGH SCHOOL CRISIS CONTINGENCY ACTION PLAN

Section 1 Introduction

1.1 There have been a number of critical incidents which have directly affected school communities over the last fifteen years both in the UK and elsewhere, such as at Dunblane in March 1996.

The first step in planning an approach is acknowledging that such major events can happen at any school.

The second step is reviewing the possible types of crisis situation or critical events that can happen, and planning how to best respond.

Section 2 Definition

2.1 Critical incidents can be described as events or circumstances that cause normally stable and healthy people to experience unusually strong emotional or psychological distress which has the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the time or later.

2.2 The characteristics of the response to a critical incident are:

- There will be severe disruption, at least temporarily, to the functioning of individuals and/or communities
- There will be perceptions of threat and helplessness, and a turning to others for help
- There will be a sense, at least temporarily, that the usual coping responses of individuals and communities have been overwhelmed

Taken from Should Crisis Call – Stirling Council 1999

Section 3 Critical Events

3.1 Among critical events that can happen during a school year are:

- Death of a student due to an accident, serious illness, suicide or murder
- Death of a student's sibling or parent due to an accident, serious illness, suicide or murder
- Other critical events such as physical assault, abduction of children and children witnessing attacks on or accidental death of others; violence, rape, bomb threat or serious injury to student or loved ones

3.2 Among other events that can happen:

- Death or serious injury to a member of staff
- Death or injuries during a school journey
- Natural or other crisis in or near the school
- Fire/explosion, destruction or vandalism at school
- Civil unrest, terrorism, hostage situation

It will be the type of event what will determine the level of response required.

Taken from Should Crisis Call

Section 4 Core Group

4.1 Preparation in advance

Anticipation and rehearsal for potential crises can, at least, partially alleviate the traumatic impact if and when a crisis does happen. The planning for this would be managed by the School Crisis Management Core Group.

4.2 School Crisis Management Core Group

The group will be established to meet at least once a year to review policy and guidelines in the context of ongoing risk assessment.

The Core Group will consist of:

- The Chair/Vice Chair of Governors
- The Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher
- The School Bursar
- A designated member of the School's Leadership Team
- A Staff Governor
- A Parent Governor
- Two School Students (one Post-16 one Pre-16)

The group could at any-time be augmented by other specialist advisors such as the Police, the Fire Service, Social Services, the LA Health and Safety Adviser.

Section 5 Crisis/Emergency Policy

5.1 General

The School has adopted various policies and procedures to minimise risks to pupils and staff, and has Health and Safety policy and procedures that are regularly reviewed. The Governing Body recognises that not all circumstances are under the control of the School and that emergencies and crises may happen. This policy has been adopted by the Governing Body after consultation with the staff and representatives of parents and students (and taking into account LA advice and guidelines).

5.2 Aims

The aims of this policy are:

- to prepare governors, staff and students for any crisis that may occur
- to ensure that there is a plan that can be implemented swiftly in the case of an emergency caused by a crisis
- to be a guide to actions in circumstances that are liable to strain the capacity of those handling the situation to think clearly.

5.3 Use of this Policy

This set of guidelines is to be checked before a school visit takes place. It will also be used in the aftermath of an emergency. For more detailed guidance the book *Wise Before the Event* is kept in the Headteacher's PA's Office and should be consulted by the members of staff managing the crisis. All staff and governors should be familiar with the contents of this guidance so that all those involved know what to do, or what not to do, if an emergency occurs.

5.4 What can Happen?

By 'crisis' we mean an incident that has caused death or serious injury to a member or members of the School community; examples of which can include:

In School or in Our Community

- The death of a student or member of staff from natural causes
- a traffic accident involving staff or students
- a deliberate act of violence against staff or students
- a school fire or major incident in a laboratory or workshop
- a serious event of any sort involving death or injuries

Out-of-School or our immediate community

- deaths or injuries on school journeys
- tragedies involving children with many others (e.g. Hillsborough)

- a bomb incident
- a terrorist incident

5.5 Most aspects of crisis are self-evident but two are important to emphasise for the purpose of planning:

- 1. Feelings of grief, guilt and insecurity caused by the crisis.** These are felt by survivors, parents, students and staff alike (not only be those directly involved) and may strike at any time over a long period after the crisis (see Post-traumatic Stress Disorder below).
- 2. Inevitable Media interest.** This will focus on the 'human interest' and on discovering 'who is to blame'. To the Media there is no such thing as an accident. Whether intended or not, the result can be to persuade people to say things in haste that they may later regret. In the immediate aftermath the Media may interfere with communications and distract people from coping with the major emergency.

5.6 The following procedures are designed to deal with the problems in the early stages.

It is assumed in what follows that our first duty is to support and help students, parents and staff involved. We are also concerned to ensure that the handling of the crisis does not result in damage to the school which will cause all students and staff to lose in the long term.

It is essential that everybody knows:

- the roles to be performed by each person
- the communications strategy
- the basic principles we will follow with students, parents and staff

5.7 Roles and Responsibilities

In term time, the response to the crisis will be managed by the Crisis Team that will include:

- the Chair of Governors
- the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher
- designated members of the Leadership Team
- the Bursar
- other relevant staff, depending on the situation

The Headteacher, if not disabled in the crisis, will be the first contact for the Media. It is probable that as things develop the Chair of Governors will need to make a statement and this may well also require comment from the LA.

The Bursar will be responsible for arranging the necessary communications network including allotting duties to other support staff for typing statements etc. He/she will also be responsible for liaising with insurers and any other external agency.

The exact roles of others will be decided at the time as any crisis will have its own particular character and need a different reaction, but among the roles needed will be:

- contact with parents
- support for staff directly involved
- liaison with remainder of staff and students
- finding assistance for the school e.g. legal etc
- liaison with relevant authorities e.g. Police/Foreign Office/Health and Safety Executive

Outside term time, the first thing for the person in charge on site to do will be to contact as many members of the Crisis Team as possible and arrange a strategy meeting.

5.8 Guidelines for Crisis Incidents On Site

In the event of a major fire or damage to roofs or buildings the Fire Bell will be activated and the normal evacuation plan will be followed UNLESS the nature of the incident means one or more exit routes are not safe. In this case students and staff will be directed appropriately by staff designated by the Headteacher and Bursar. In either case the Emergency Services will be contacted immediately by the Deputy Headteacher or a member of staff delegated by him/her.

In the event of the crisis being of a nature to make evacuation unsafe (an armed intruder on site) the warning bell will be rung three times with short intervals and staff will remain in classrooms until instructed to leave by staff designated by the Head and Bursar. In this case the Police and Emergency Services will be contacted immediately by the Deputy Headteacher or a member of staff delegated by him/her.

5.9 Guidelines for Crisis Incidents Off Site

When a crisis occurs off site it is critical to know quickly who has been involved, therefore:

- all trip leaders will make sure that there is a list in the School Office with the names of all students and staff and a contact number/s for parent/s
- every member of staff on the trip (not only the leader) will keep with them at all times a list of students on the trip. This may be the only starting point for identifying students as the leaders may be incapacitated

It is essential that information is passed to the School as soon as possible so that support can be given to all who need it and that accurate information can be given to the LA and the Media.

All the staff on a trip will:

- know how an alarm is to be raised
- have to hand a number to contact to report any crisis. This will not be the main School number in case the phone lines are jammed. (Any such number must be kept absolutely confidential)

As soon as the injured are properly looked after and in the hands of competent assistance then communicating the news to School is the priority.

Once that has been done the priority for staff on the ground is to look after students and each other. Dealing with the Media, with parents and all other issues then becomes the job of the Crisis Team.

5.10 Immediate Action in the Case of Crisis

The Chair of Governors will be contacted immediately, or in his/her absence, the Vice Chair. If neither is available, another nominated governor will be contacted. The relevant governor will be asked to join the Crisis Team at the school.

- The Police will be contacted immediately to ask for help in controlling access to the School
- the LA will be contacted to identify what resources it can make available
- the Crisis Team will convene at an appropriate headquarters
- roles will be allotted
- if the crisis is abroad then a contact will be opened up to authorities in the foreign country through the appropriate embassy or the Foreign Office and arrangements made to get a senior member of staff and someone familiar with the language (if possible) out to the scene of the crisis as a matter of urgency to take charge from the staff involved

- parents will be contacted. It may be necessary to send someone off site to phone from a line that will not be blocked or overheard
- depending on the situation, headquarters will either be in A77 or another suitable building on or near the School site, depending on the circumstances
- if students are off site parents should be re-united with them as swiftly as possible. (It is the duty of the Headteacher (or Headteacher's delegated representative) to determine whether it may be helpful for parents to view the accident site so they can share the situation with their children

5.11 Communicating with Parents

Only designated members of staff/governors have the authority to contact parents. Such persons, when answering or contacting parents will have a written list of known facts issued by the Headteacher (or Headteacher's delegated representative). The designated person will only:

- say what is known for a fact
- say how parents will be updated as information becomes more complete
- say how parents should contact hospitals, etc
- check whether any help is needed with transport

While the School's main responsibility is to parents whose children are involved, there will be other parents who will want to know what has happened from the School. Depending on the circumstances it may be appropriate to:

- send out a briefing paper
- post information on the School website
- use the Media to communicate with parents

The Headteacher (or Headteacher's delegated representative) will make these decisions.

5.12 Communicating with Students

If the crisis occurs during term time much will depend on whether information is available while students are in School. Priorities will include:

- to make sure that all members of the School Community are safe
- to make sure that students know what is true
- as appropriate, for the School community to share its shock and/or grief

The procedure will normally be:

- students will be given information in tutor groups by selected staff or through assemblies

If a crisis occurs during a holiday there may have to be special arrangements to allow families, friends and others to come into School, and for an designated member of staff to be available to inform and support. This will be determined by the Headteacher (or the Headteacher's representative) and put into place by the Crisis Team.

5.13 Communicating with the Media

The LA Media Unit will be used wherever possible to assist in dealing with the Media. Media interest may seem intrusive and unhelpful. It is important to realise, however, that this interest is legitimate. Used properly, the Media can help to communicate important messages to parents and the community. It is important to do everything to be helpful without compromising the essential interests of the School. The Headteacher will explain to the Press what is happening but will stress that students' and parents' interests must come first. He/she will ask for the Press' co-operation in achieving this aim. (The Headteacher and Crisis Team will liaise with the LA at all times in carrying out their role).

- All statements to the Media will only be made after discussion with the Headteacher (or his/her delegated representative)
- the Chair of Governors will make a statement at the earliest appropriate moment
- Governors and staff will refer all questions to the Headteacher (or delegated representative) and must refuse to make any comment or react to any statement put to them by the media.

The following principles will apply to contact with the Press:

- that nothing said by the School increases grief and distress
- that nothing that is said compromises the School in any further legal action
- The Media will normally not be invited on to the School site and if they do make their way on to the site uninvited, they should be referred to the Headteacher, who will normally ask them to leave, and will explain why. The assistance of the Police will be sought if necessary
- It is the responsibility of the Headteacher in consultation with the Crisis Team to determine whether a Press Conference should be arranged in a place away from the students. If there are signs of devastation on the School site, it may be inevitable that they will have to be allowed to take pictures but the Crisis Team will attempt to ensure that these will not add to the grief of parents and students
- Students will be kept away from the Media and the importance of this will be explained to the students
- No addresses will be given to the Media

5.14 Appendices

Appendix A

Guidance to the Headteacher (or representative) on dealing with the Media

The Headteacher will say that the School will:

- tell them everything known definitely as soon as we have told parents
- tell them what we do not know at this stage
- tell them when further information will be available
- not speculate or go along with their speculation
- not be giving any names or confirm any names until all the members of a trip are accounted for

Within these limits the Headteacher has the responsibility to give quotable statements and go on air.

Interview Technique

- Generally it will be important to 'come in under the questions', being calmer and quieter than the questioners
- two points clearly made and repeated are worth many made in a confused way
- it is crucial to remember that you are talking to the audience beyond the interviewer while answering the interviewer's questions
- meet aggressive questions with facts e.g.
 1. 'all trips go through a vetting procedure'
 2. 'we have fire practices termly'

Generally we will be saying over and over again that the School will turn its attention to causes and lessons to be learned when we have done what we can do for students and parents immediately affected.

Appendix B

Short and Medium-Term Actions

Short-Term Action

The Governing Body will meet as soon as practicable to be briefed by the Headteacher and Crisis Team, and to decide how any inquiry should proceed. The Crisis Team will seek advice on this as appropriate.

It will be the responsibility of the Chair of Governors to make an announcement about any inquiry. The Chair of Governors will ensure that included in any public statement will be the governors' resolve to co-operate fully with any external inquiry.

The Crisis Team will determine how to help the School community come to terms with the shock and grief, and which agencies to use.

The Crisis Team will bear in mind in all its decisions the importance of enabling normal life to be resumed as soon as possible without denying or minimising what has happened.

Steps should be taken to restore the situation for the remainder of the School community and lessons should be as normal as possible as soon as possible.

Legal advice will be sought as appropriate from the LA.

Medium-Term Action

The Crisis Team will determine how best to ease the return of students involved and what support they will need.

Normally appropriate consultancy/counselling will be sought (see Appendix C).

The more detailed advice in *Wise Before The Event* will be considered.

Appendix C

Note on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Role of Counselling

It must be expected that some of those involved in the crisis will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. This may involve panic attacks, flashbacks, feelings of depression and guilt. This may be deeply disabling and often affect adults more than children. Expert advice should be sought on this and part of the longer-term plan must include plans to support both students and staff members who may be unable to return to School and parents who have been directly affected.

It was generally thought in the past that immediate access to counselling was helpful in the aftermath of a crisis. This has been shown to be sometimes counter-productive and in some cases damaging.

Advice now suggests that counselling should be postponed until at least a month after the event and then brought in for those who have been unable to 'move on'. The main thrust of the School's practice must be not to deny the events but to emphasise that 'life goes on' and that 'we have the strength to cope with even this'. It is vital that children and adults are not disempowered in dealing with the trauma of the crisis by the suggestion that they cannot cope without help or that they must relive the crisis in order to come to terms with it.

Appendix D

Emergency Telephone Contact Schedule

SCHOOL

Adam Chedburn Headteacher direct line into his office 0191 251 7420
Direct line to Headteacher's PA's Office 0191 200 8805
Adam Chedburn Mobile 07958 052313 Home 0191 253 3220
Rachel Mays Deputy Headteacher Mobile 07801 354663 Home 0191 236 3617
Chair of Governing Body Paul Mitchell Mobile 07770 385349 Home 0191 2526611
Vice Chair of Governing Body John Fenwick Mobile 07931 779 232 Home 0191 253 1084

LOCAL AUTHORITY

Gill Alexander Strategic Director Children Young People and Learning 643 8001
Hazel Thompson PA to Gill Alexander 643 8000
Steve Rutland Deputy Director (Whitley Bay Lead) 643 8782
Mobile 07812 030536
Jean Griffiths Chief Advisor Secondary 643 8508
Mobile 07808 783019
Karen Watson Chief Education Psychologist 643 7979
Iain Betham Buildings Emergency 643 8092
Mobile 07989 449185
Paul Cook Head of Safeguarding 643 7381
Cath McEvoy Child Protection Key Officer 643 8418
Mobile 07870 681187
Child Protection Office Hours 643 7979 Out of Hours 0300 123 0812
First Call (Children) 643 7979
Nichola Nicholls Media Unit 643 5081
Jeanette Hedley Senior Communications Officer 643 5077
Simon Hughes Media Unit 643 5075
Media Unit Out of Hours Emergency Mobile 07968 380314
Health and Safety Geoff Scrafton/Donna McTernan 643 8700
Christina Ponting Human Resources 643 8010
Mobile 07970 640 472
Legal Services Stephen Ballantyne 643 5329 / Jan Hawkins 643 5453
Northumbria Police 03456 043043
Perth Gardens Emergency Call Centre 200 6800

Appendix E

Site Plan

This policy will be kept under regular review in the light of developments and best practice.

Next Review date: _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Headteacher

Signed _____

Date _____

Chair of Governing Body

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