

GLENCORSE PRIMARY SCHOOL

'A small school building big dreams'



Critical Incident Response Policy

CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE POLICY

What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is defined as any event that has a stressful impact severe enough to overwhelm usually effective coping skills of either an individual or group. Critical incidents are typically sudden, powerful events that are outside the range of ordinary human experiences. Because they are so sudden and unusual, they can have a strong emotional effect even on well trained experienced adults

Aims of the Policy

Glencorse Primary School has prepared this policy in order to respond to, and support children, families and staff in the event of a critical incident.

This is to acknowledge the diverse school community and military context of our pupils and family population.

The policy:

- identifies systems of internal and external support to the school
- provides a school framework to plan and manage a response (immediate and long term)
- defines a procedure of communication between the school, the family, the authority and the Unit Welfare Officer of the Royal Highland Fusiliers (2Scots)

Policy Development, Monitoring and Evaluation

The policy was developed by the Critical Response Working Party that consisted of Senior Management Staff and the Support for Learning teacher, in conjunction with Education Psychologists from Midlothian Council Psychological Services

This policy will be monitored throughout the academic session and evaluated following each critical incident, or at an annual review.

Possible Events Considered as Critical Incidents

Child	-	injury within school
	-	major injury to a child
	-	death of a child

Significant adult in school community

- death of a parent
- death of a staff member

Soldier

- deployment
- deployment to war zones
- home coming
- casualties
- major injuries
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Procedures for Internal Communication during a critical incident

News received during the weekend:

1. Use telephone system (Appendix 1)
2. Inform staff about meeting 8:30am next day
3. Follow plan for sharing information before school day begins (see below)

News received before the school day begins (Monday-Friday)

1. Headteacher to call meeting with staff
2. Debrief staff
3. Continue **routine** for the day:
 - a) increase visibility and availability of staff for all children
 - b) staff cover will be available, if required

Headteacher will ensure on-going communication, throughout the day if necessary.

End of teaching day:

1. Follow-up staff meeting at 3:15pm
2. Update and check status (changes in support required/concerns etc)

News received during the school day:

1. Administration to prepare information for staff
2. Headteacher to inform staff at break, lunch, or at the end of the day
3. Meeting for all staff in staffroom

4. Debrief staff
5. Inform staff of meeting next morning if appropriate (8:30am - pre-school)

Confidentiality

All staff of Midlothian Council are subject to the code of conduct for employees. This stresses the importance of confidentiality and all staff must ensure that information given to them to allow them to support families and children is not discussed out of school.

List of External Supports

Midlothian Council

Alan Wait, School Group Manager
Educational Psychologist
Employee Counselling Service

Ministry of Defence

Unit Welfare Office

Responses to a Critical Incident

(Midlothian Council Critical Incident Response Plan)

A. Immediate

What should be done immediately the crisis happens?

B. Short Term

What is to be done in the hours and days after the incident?

C. Medium Term

What to do on the weeks following the crisis.

It is importance to establish from the outset that ultimate responsibility for the care of the children who are involved in a school related incident remains with the Headteacher. The Headteacher should be mindful of this particularly when liaising with external agencies such as the emergency services and helping professionals.

Critical Incident Response

In the event of a critical incident occurring out with the school's jurisdiction (eg. at home, deployment), the following tasks will need attention.

A. IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

Task 1: OBTAIN FACTUAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE INCIDENT/CONTACTING PARENTS

Where a pupil/parent (soldier) is injured or killed in a situation out with the school's responsibility the school may not always hear directly or immediately from the parents/MOD. In such circumstances, the Headteacher may have to make a judgement as to whether to verify firstly information about the incident with a third party (eg. police, hospital, Unit Welfare Office, Padre) or, if the information received is judged to be accurate, whether to contact the parents directly.

When the parents are contacted, the Headteacher should convey the school's concerns and, if necessary, condolences.

PERSONNEL: Headteacher, Staff, Parents

TIMESCALE: As soon as possible

Task 2: CONVENE CRITICAL RESPONSE GROUP

If the circumstances or severity of the crisis event occurring out of school is likely to have a serious effect upon the school, the Headteacher would probably wish to convene the school's **Critical Response Group (CRG)**

PERSONNEL: Headteacher

TIMESCALE: As soon as possible

Task 3: CONTACT WITH PARENTS

Arrangements can be made for members of staff to contact the parents as soon as possible. Visits could be arranged if it is deemed to be a step that would be welcomed by the parents. It may be appropriate to deliver a card offering support and/or a home visit to parents or children. Upon visiting, if staff consider parents require continuing support, staff may feel it appropriate to spend some considerable time with the parents. They might also consider it necessary to sensitively ascertain whether the parents are being supported in their grief by relatives and friends. If parents seem particularly overwhelmed, they might be advised to contact their GP.

PERSONNEL: Staff/parents, as delegated by the CRG

TIMESCALE: As appropriate

Task 4: CALL STAFF MEETING

As soon as contact has been made with parents, relevant staff should be called to an emergency staff meeting where all the facts concerning the incident are conveyed to staff. Instructions can be given at this meeting by the Headteacher as to:

1. How the children are to be told
2. What the children are to be told
3. Who is to tell the children

Experience suggests that children cope best when told the full facts in the class, rather than in a whole school setting.

PERSONNEL: Headteacher

TIMESCALE: As soon as possible

B. SHORT TERM RESPONSE

Death or injury to pupils and staff (parents/soldiers) which occurs away from school's jurisdiction can be no less emotionally traumatic to staff and pupils than events which occur in school.

Pupils who know the victim well may need substantial support.

Should the victim be a soldier (parent) on operations, or a colleague of other parents with children in the school, with the anticipated media coverage, many other aspects of response may need to be considered.

It is suggested that consideration be given to the following:

Task 1: INFORMING CHILDREN OF THE INCIDENT

As soon as possible after the school hears of a critical incident (eg someone has been killed or injured), steps should be taken to give the full facts to children and staff.

Children are best told, not in full school assemblies, but in small groups, perhaps in class groups by teaching staff with whom they are familiar.

Teachers, who will have been well briefed beforehand by the Critical Response Group, should expect to be questioned further about the event. Finally, the children should be told that there will be further opportunities to discuss the incident.

Children who are obviously distraught should be supported by staff before being returned to class.

TASK 2: PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUPILS TO TALK

TASK 3: CONTACT SUPPORTING PROFESSIONALS

TASK 4: ATTENDANCE AT FUNERALS

C. MEDIUM TERM RESPONSE

It is often harder for a school to support a pupil who has returned to school having been involved in trauma and grief out with school. Staff and pupils have not been a party to the incident as with an 'in school' incident. They may also not be fully aware of the facts surrounding the child's pain. There can be a certain sensitivity and embarrassment at raising sensitive issues like pain and death. Finally, some people believe (erroneously!) that people are best left to forget the suffering that has happened and get on with their life.

However, there remains many ways in which school can help pupils who have been involved in a crisis situation at home. Most measures to be taken are similar to those to be adopted by those with children traumatised in 'school' incidents.

TASK 1: DEVISING A RETURN TO SCHOOL PROGRAMME

TASK 2: MONITORING CHANGES IN PUPIL'S LEVEL OF FUNCTIONING

TASK 3: SUPPORTING CHILDREN

TASK 4: PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO PARENTS

Appendices:

1. Staff Lists of telephone and buddy system
2. Responding to children
3. Pupil list (identification of parent's battalion)
4. Resources on grief education

APPENDIX 1 Staff List

Julie Barnes 0131 271 4590 or 07946425268

Victoria Beveridge

Alison Hutton

Hilary McEwan

Appendix 2 CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE

Critical Incident Response(s) - (suggestions)

"I know you are really upset"

Children need to feel that somebody has acknowledged their distress

"I know that you are worried about your daddy/mummy"

It is most helpful to deal with the emotions underlying comments rather than provide a direct answer.

Staff may choose to describe a parent's training and their professionalism, the precautions that are taken, as well as, the fact that their parents are not alone.

"I can see that you are feeling really scared about this."

"It is hard to think that your dad had to go so far away to do his job as a soldier."

"I know it will feel great when your dad/mum comes home."

Always be honest with children. Acknowledge their concerns while reassuring them that responsible adults are in charge.

For a child returning after a distressing incident the following may help

"I know that has happened and you are feeling very sad."

"We are pleased you are back in class"

"Your friends know what has happened"

"If you want to speak to me just ask"

Remember, there are times when you just need to *be quiet*.

If nothing else, give a HUG

Appendix 3

SHARING INFORMATION WITH CLASSES ABOUT CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Supporting the child

All classes should be familiar with circle time and it should be used to share difficult information with children within the classroom. All classes will need to be told at the same time and we will agree this at the staff meeting. If possible it should not be at the end of the day so we have upset children going out to the playground at the same time.

Start with the basic facts in simple language appropriate to the age of the children. Remember to be clear ie use the word died if talking about a death as children may not understand other expressions such as passed away.

Acknowledge sadness of the event.

Allow children to comment/reflect on what has been said if they wish.

Talk about being a team and supporting their classmate(s) returning. Let children talk about what they might do. Say we don't know what their friend will want and we must let them guide us. They may want to talk to friends or not. They might want to do the same things as before or they might not.

Supporting the adults

Sharing information with the children may be upsetting for you too. Please remember the Headteacher and other members of staff are there to support you before, after or during circle time or at any other point in dealing with a critical incident.

Appendix 4

RESOURCES FOR GRIEF EDUCATION

Richmondshope.org.uk - A Bereavement Project for children

When Someone dies Information for parents/carers