

RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN SCHOOLS¹

SHORT-TERM TASKS

Where possible, psychologists should seek immediate back up from other psychology support staff in regional offices or neighbouring schools.

STEP 01 Consult the school emergency management plan which should include protocols and guidelines describing:

- the roles and responsibilities of the school Emergency Management Team – senior leadership and welfare personnel
- templates for staff briefings, letters and messages for the school community
- clear and transparent protocols for documenting the incident.

STEP 02 Psychologists will usually be part of the school planning for early intervention and response strategies including to:

- notify the school authorising body or office of emergency and security management (head office or regional office)
- notify emergency services, police, SES, ambulance, fire brigade using 000
- gather information – clarify and confirm facts about the incident
- inform staff
- inform close friends of those affected
- contact neighbouring schools which may be affected
- develop consistent scripts for office personnel, voicemail messages and media enquiries
- set up a recovery room for affected students and parents.

STEP 03 Psychological First Aid provided for staff and students to:

- reduce distress and address immediate needs and concerns
- provide physical safety and comfort
- provide emotional and practical support
- connect children with families.

MEDIUM-TERM TASKS

- Provide information about trauma, grief and loss and the impact on a child's functioning for parents.
- Encourage support networks among parents and provide a gathering place at the school.
- Provide information on coping for teachers and the school community.
- Provide support for staff and students attending a funeral.
- Provide psychoeducation for teachers about common traumatic stress reactions that might manifest in the classroom.
- Identify children who need more specific trauma focused treatment.
- Provide opportunities to guide parents and carers in effective coping skills for themselves and their children.
- Deliver targeted staff professional learning about trauma informed classrooms.
- Monitor opportunities for self-care for the helpers and supervision and peer support opportunities for psychologists.
- Link school communities with needed services.

LONG-TERM TASKS

- Plan for memorials, anniversaries and significant dates.
- Collate messages and children's artworks into a memorial book.
- Evaluate the school response and recovery process and revisit Emergency Management Plans with this new information.
- Monitor staff and student wellbeing over time.
- Consider curriculum changes in the light of the incident. Could the school personal development and resilience curriculum be further developed?
- Review school policy documents.

¹ <http://bit.ly/2AVVUPO>