CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE POLICY

Policy Status: CURRENT
Policy Classification: Executive Office / Board Endorsed
Policy Established: 2005
Policy Last Reviewed: 2014
Policy Responsibility: Executive Office

PREAMBLE

A critical incident can occur at any time and in turn will affect members of our College community. The people within our College may experience strong psychological and emotional distress at the time of such an incident which may then affect their ability to cope at the time of the crisis or after the event.

Critical incident may involve, for example, a natural disaster, bomb, suicide of staff or student, member of the College community, violent/sexual assault, and death of staff or student/s, siege, laboratory explosion, fire or outdoor accident.

DEFINITIONS

A critical incident can be described as any event or circumstance that:

- causes 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 of the event or later.
- endangers the health and well being of staff or students at St Augustine's College, Sydney
- endangers property within the St Augustine's College - Sydney campus.

Critical incidents often have similar characteristics including:

- rapid time sequences
- overwhelming of usual coping responses of individuals or communities
- severe disruption, at least temporarily, to the functioning of individuals or communities, and;
- perceptions of threat and helplessness and a turning to others for help.
RATIONALE

This plan has been developed so that the staff of St Augustine’s College, Sydney may respond in the most appropriate manner regarding their “Duty of Care” and expected responsibilities.

Predetermined contingency plans/guidelines can do much to:
• lessen the impact of critical incident events
• lessen the time lost in recovery, and
• restore people to “good health”.

AIM

The aim of this document is to minimize the impact of critical incidents and to enable St Augustine’s College, Sydney to return to a regular routine as quickly and sensitively as possible.

PROCEDURES

The Principal / Head of School and the Critical Incident Team form at the time to respond to the incident and to decide at what level the policy should be implemented. The Critical Incident Response Policy is designed to deal with plans after an incident has occurred. Evacuation procedures, where required, are outlined in the Administration and Procedures Manual.

STRATEGIES

The most important actions of critical incident management are:
• Follow the College Critical Incident Plan
• Determine the facts
• Respond to the emergency to minimize injury/ensure safety
• Manage information effectively
• Care for students and staff
• Provide closure to the incident

NB. ALWAYS REFER TO THE CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE FLOWCHART

1. First Aid

2. Evacuation Procedures

   Fire or Bomb threat evacuation procedure is to be clearly displayed and practised twice per year and should be used for critical incidents.
3. **The Critical Incident Team** consists of:
   - Principal
   - Head of School (Chair)
   - Head of Executive Office
   - Head of Student Welfare
   - Head of Academic Life
   - Head of Sport & Co-curricular
   - Dean of Senior School
   - Dean of Middle School
   - Dean of Primary School
   - Executive Officer: Operations
   - College Psychologist
   - College Chaplain (as required)
   - Executive Officer: International Programme (if Critical Incident involves an international student)

4. **Debriefing**
   All staff and students who are involved in or witness a critical incident, or have a close relationship with the victims of a critical incident can participate in debriefing activities organised by the school.

5. **Information Management**
   
   a) **Staff**
   In such situations a full staff meeting will occur as soon as possible where staff will be supplied with:
   - Accurate information about the incident
   - Strategies to assist students to talk about the incident in a productive manner
   - Information to assist in understanding grief reactions
   - Strategies for identifying students who should be referred for further counseling.

   b) **Students**
   The CIT will decide how to inform students about the critical incident. This will include a whole school assembly. NB. Information needs to be consistent and accurate so that rumours and speculation amongst the student body are minimised.

   c) **Parents**
   A letter should be sent to parents as soon as possible explaining the facts of the incident, the College’s response, possible reactions of students and sources of assistance for families affected.

   d) **Media**
   The Principal / Head of School is the designated Media Liaison Person and all media enquiries about the student / staff member and the College at the time of the critical incident MUST be referred to him. The Principal / Head of School may seek advice from the Chairman of the College Board and / or the Prior Provincial.

   e) **Telephone Communication**
   All staff contacted by the CIT to be advised by prepared statement. All Front Office staff are to be given a prepared statement for any public enquiries and personal visits.

6. **Support, Counseling and Supervision**
   Not all people involved in a critical incident require formal debriefing. Students not involved will probably require emotional assistance to be provided by Year Co-ordinators, their Assistants and Tutors in informal class settings.
The College Psychologist will organise and co-ordinate student counselling. During and after a critical incident students will require supervision and comfort. A safe room will be set up by the CIT to assist students and staff who have been emotionally affected by the incident.

If circumstances allow, it is better to keep students at school and to monitor their emotional wellbeing. It is a desirable situation to have classes return to normal as soon as possible after the incident.

7. People who may be affected by a critical incident:
   - People exposed to incidents (students, staff) who suffer intense trauma including injury
   - Relatives and friends – those grieving for the injured or affected
   - People with previous trauma and grief – not directly involved but affected because of a previous incident
   - Helpers or recovery personnel – those in community not directly involved but affected by the incident.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Principal / Head of School will:
   - develop and implement the Critical Incident Management Plan, reflecting the local conditions in the school
   - appoint and monitor a Critical Incident Management Team
   - promote knowledge of the existence and content of the Critical Incident Management Plan in the school
   - communicate decisions regarding an incident, in line with the Critical Incident Management Plan
   - be guided by the Critical Incident Management Plan when making decisions concerning communication with the media. The Principal / Head of School will act as spokesperson for the College, in line with the Critical Incident Management Plan.

Staff will:
   - make themselves aware of the relevant policy and procedures relating to critical incidents
   - follow mandatory reporting requirements as required
   - follow procedures in the event of a critical incident
DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

It is important that the Principal / Head of School must be contacted whenever a critical incident occurs that has the potential to generate media interest. The College Principal is the spokesperson for the College in accordance with the Media Policy.

If the media enters College property without permission, they may be requested to leave, but this could result in them employing other methods to get the story or pictures. If the media arrives unannounced, they should be referred to the Principal / Head of School. If the Principal / Head of School is not yet on the scene, the media should be directed to a safe area where they do not disturb the crisis recovery process. They should be informed their requests would be dealt with as soon as possible.

Summary Procedures for Responding

Procedures for responding to Critical Incident Response Procedures (see Critical Incident Response Flowchart) must be displayed in prominent locations around the College and workplace. This procedure sheet must be included in the Staff Administration and Procedures Manual and is available on ATLAS and the College website.

Management of Critical Incidents Occurring Away from the School

The person in charge of managing a critical incident away from College premises should:

- ensure the safety of students and staff;
- assert authority in a calm, reassuring manner;
- ensure students and staff stay together and complete a roll call as soon as possible;
- follow the instructions of the venue management in implementing their emergency plans, as long as these do not conflict with the duty of care of the students;
- advise emergency services of College personnel and students unaccounted for;
- advise the Principal / Head of School as soon as possible;
- ensure parents will be informed of any delay in returning to the College; and, remain with the group until relieved of responsibility.

Critical Incident Response for an International Student

The Educational Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (ESOS Act) requires the College to notify DEEWR and DIAC as soon as practical after the incident and in the case of a student’s death or other absence affecting the student’s participation, the incident will need to be reported via the Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS).

When an international student dies or sustains serious injury, the College may be required to assist the student’s family. This may include:

- hiring interpreters
- making arrangements for hospital / funeral / memorial service / repatriation
- obtaining a death certificate
- assisting with personal items
- assisting with visa issues