

NORTHWICK PARK PRIMARY AND NURSERY **ACADEMY**

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

This policy sets out the procedures to be followed to ensure the safety and protection of the whole school community in the event of a critical incident.

Definition

A critical incident can be a physical incident or psychological trauma that has a severe immediate impact and likely long term effect on pupils, staff or parents. This may include:

- Incidents that involve staff, children or young people. .
- People made disasters/emergencies
- Natural disasters/emergencies.

Crisis management and recovery processes involve personal support, crisis intervention and a whole range of practical assistance.

The policy will name the people who will assume key roles (Critical Incident Team), the information and procedures that will need to be in place. The communication framework required to handle any contingency and the support structures for staff.

The Critical Incident Team has responsibility for ensuring that procedures are properly addressed at times of high emotion and that if the Headteacher is the subject of the incident then the response mechanism should proceed effectively. If the incident subsequently involves legal action, a precise response to the incident should be known and be able to be verified by more than one person.

Major Incidents Focused on People.

Whilst all critical incidents are difficult for all concerned, those that involve serious injury or death are inevitably traumatic.

By their very nature and definition, critical incidents tend to disorientate and may overwhelm those involved. Planning ahead is a necessary precaution and can be crucial.

Communication during and following an incident is, of course, of great importance.

Planning for an Emergency

It is important that the school knows which people can be contacted immediately following an incident, what information is available and where this is stored. Therefore, the Critical Incident Team will:

- Issue all staff with a Critical Incident Management Plan.
- Review the Critical Incident Management Plan regularly.

The Critical Incident Team will comprise of the Headteacher, Deputy Head Teachers, Senior Team Managers, Site Manager, Bursar and Secretary. Others may be co-opted as necessary in light of the nature of the emergency and the availability of the people and personal involvement of those concerned. An Incident Manager will be appointed by the Headteacher (or Deputy in her absence) in response to the type of incident being faced.

In the event of an emergency all staff, including non-teaching and temporary staff, should be notified as soon as possible. The main school office should be used as the central liaison point for all incidents. However, if this is not available, the headteacher's office/bursar's office will be used.

In the first instance, it may be appropriate to use dedicated mobile phones to separate incoming and out-going calls.

The following information will be held in school.

- Telephone Numbers of all members of staff
- Names of key holders (probably including the Incident Managers)
- Student contact information
- Details of names, location and contact details relating to all pupils and staff off site at any time, e.g. school outings, etc.
- Significant medical information relating to pupils and staff off site on school outings at any time
- Telephone numbers of all Governors
- Contact list of all people, groups or organisations who visit or use the school and would need to be informed.
- Contact list of people and groups used by the school, e.g. suppliers, contractors
- School's Bank details, e.g. account number and sort code
- Back up disks for all accounts
- Location of keys to school safe
- Premises and site plan of the school
- Gas, electric and water mains control positions
- Computer based copy of schemes of work, policies, etc. on disk.

Responding to an Emergency

Initial responses should be to:

- Contact the Headteacher and all members of the Critical Incident Team
- Assess that all children and young people are safe – during a major incident the safety of all is paramount
- Build a profile of the incident, e.g. who is most affected by the incident and how it may have affected them
- Check to establish whether any individual or group needs immediate attention
- Assess immediate practical needs.

The incident will be reported to CSF by telephoning one of their help desk numbers. These numbers are to be held by the Critical Incident Team members at home and at school.

One telephone call to CSF will be sufficient for all arrangements to be put in place, identifying a control point at or near the site to manage the incident in the initial hours or days.

CSF will provide full support to enable the incident to be managed as effectively as possible. This could include making arrangements for:

- Communication with all relevant CSF individuals and groups
- Emergency accommodation
- Additional teaching resources
- Additional staffing
- Transport
- Specialist advice
- The dissemination of information.

Communications

Those dealing with in-coming calls should provide an agreed factual statement together with re-assurance of action being taken at the incident site.

A separate dedicated line will be needed for out-going calls; this might be a mobile phone or line that cannot take in-coming calls, e.g. the fax line. It is important to remember that mobile phones are not necessarily secure and that caution about what is said should, therefore, be exercised at all times.

Contacting Families Directly Affected

This should be done quickly and sensitively. Consistency of information is vital, so it is best to avoid a chain of communication in this instance.

If parents cannot be contacted a message should be left with a relative, friend or neighbour. Alternatively, a note will be dropped through the door of the house, asking the parent to call the school as soon as possible.

If parents are to be invited to a venue to meet school or CSF staff, the venue should be secure and the location not made known to the media.

Staff will be able to suggest individuals, groups or organisations that can offer suitable relevant support.

Responding to Calls from Relatives

The members of staff delegated/permitted to talk to relatives should:

- Use language and tone that alleviates anxiety
- Anticipate questions relevant to the incident, e.g. ‘Did my child witness the incident?’ and be prepared to answer them.

Information for Teaching and Support Staff

It is vital that all adults in contact with children and young people are kept well informed and feel secure in handling questions and comments. A schedule for up-dating them will be arranged, e.g. breaks, at the end of the school day or first thing in the morning. This ensures that knowledge is common and questions are answered.

Staff will be cautioned against talking to the media or responding to questions from reporters.

Informing Pupils about the Incident.

Staff may be given advice and guidance on what the pupils should be told and how.

Some information may be given in whole school assemblies and then discussed in class. Other types of information may best be disseminated in small groups by the staff closest to the pupils.

Our pupils may not understand the full implications of any incident, so information given should be tailored to cognitive and emotional levels of the children.

Pupils must be given all the time they need to ask questions or talk about the incident to have their worries allayed.

Families should be informed about the amount of information their children have been given as they will not be able to relay this information themselves.

Contacting Families and Others not Directly Affected.

It may be sufficient to inform other parents by letter. In other cases, it may be more appropriate to call an early meeting at the school, especially if the incident is one which could call into question aspects of the school’s organisation that could affect all pupils.

A prepared verbal or written statement can provide necessary facts, expressions of sympathy and concern and possibly a message for the community. This letter could be passed on to the media, so guidance from the Communications Unit will be sought before issuing any form of written statements.

The school will make a decision based on the nature of the incident whether a letter is sent immediately or if it would be better to be delayed until all facts are known.

The Media

Once an incident has been reported to CSF, the Communication Team will contact the school as a matter of high priority. However, the media may make contact before they arrive and contingency plan support systems are in place.

If the media contact a member of staff before a member of the Communications Unit has arrived staff should:

- Buy time, e.g. by saying the Headteacher is not available but will call back.
- Be clear about who is and is not permitted to speak to the media on behalf of the school.
- Accept that in certain circumstances, the delegated person may not be the most appropriate person to talk to the press and a substitute needs to be available.
- Anyone talking to the press should have a colleague present to take notes and record what is said.
- Provide nothing but the facts
- Give a prepared statement rather than an interview and anticipate the worst possible questions.
- Immediately correct any incorrect or misleading information – by interrupting if necessary
- Be sensitive about personal information
- Do not apportion blame or liability to anyone even in ‘of the record’ conversations.
- Remember to praise and thank any person or service that have helped during the incident
- Remember that there are no ‘off the record’ conversations and that all contact with the press should be treated with caution.

Support for People

Particularly in the event of a critical incident, it is easy for the emotions and stresses experienced by the person managing the incident to be overlooked. It is important that

those managing the incident also take care of themselves and that someone takes on responsibility for ensuring this element is not forgotten.

The School Development Adviser will have the responsibility within CSF of ensuring that the Headteacher or Incident Manager will be provided with personal advice and support.

It is important to acknowledge the emotional state of all the people involved – staff, pupils and parents.

It must be recognised that, depending on the nature of the emergency, not all staff may feel able to support others or the pupils and that a burden of support may, therefore, fall on a disproportionately small number of staff. It is important that this is openly acknowledged and recognised as an acceptable and possible inevitable position to adopt.

A critical incident could have an impact on emotionally vulnerable children and affect their behaviour or emotional state and the school is prepared to offer them support from appropriate professionals within or outside school.

Staff closely involved in the incident in any way should be offered opportunities for debriefing and counselling, informally or through a more formal structure.

There may be long term effects on some people, and staff or pupils may need to be offered professional therapeutic help.

The School will consider designating areas for parents and others to meet so that support can be given but privacy maintained.

Formal and Informal Recognition and Rituals

- Arrangements may be made to express sympathy to the families directly affected
- Injured children can be visited in hospital and pupils can be encouraged to send cards and letters
- Staff and pupils may attend funerals if they are sure of being welcome. The school may be closed in recognition of funerals
- Special Assemblies and in-school memorial services may be held.

Implications for the wider Curriculum

- Designated staff will receive training in areas such as loss, change or bereavement
- There is provision of relevant fiction and non-fiction books in the school's library
- In PSHE, discussions with pupils about what are normal reactions to bereavement, stress or crisis take place.

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