St Patrick’s Primary School

Serious Incident Policy

September 2016
## SERIOUS INCIDENT POLICY

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RATIONALE

It is the responsibility of all members of the Catholic School Community to collaborate in the provision of a caring environment.

The school is a major part of the staff and student’s social, cultural, spiritual and emotional environment.

A Serious incident is an unusual or unexpected occurrence, which causes disruption to the school and creates significant danger or risk. A Serious Incident potentially creates situations where staff, students and parents feel unsafe, vulnerable and under stress. This has the capacity to trigger significant emotional reaction in individuals and/or cause significant disruption to the normal operation of the school. Due to the varied nature of Serious Incidents the potential impact could have a severe immediate effect and a likely long term influence on the school community.

A sensitive awareness of the varying needs and circumstances of students, staff and families is important in such a crisis.

The early identification of, and preparation for a potential critical incident or crisis, will help in creating a safe, supportive environment for students and staff members. Due to the varied nature of a Serious Incident examples could range from:

• Death of a student/staff member
• A serious injury that will require prolonged hospitalization, e.g. spinal injury, heart attack
• Any incident that requires police intervention
• An incident involving motor vehicles causing injury
• An incident that may generate media attention for the school
• A fire or explosion

AIM

The key aim of this policy is to assist the school in preparing and implementing a thoroughly planned response to a critical incident. This response will ensure the safety, wellbeing and protection of the St Patrick’s School community.
IMPLEMENTATION

There are four phases to any serious incident.

1. Before the event.
2. At or immediately after the event.
3. Medium Term (Some months after).
4. Long Term – (more than 12 months after).

Establishment of a Serious Incident Management Team (SIMT) (comprised of staff) responsible for developing a workable, management plan which is written, simple, disseminated and tested. The SIMT should work in assessing workplace hazards and risks and developing appropriate management plans for such contingencies.

The Plan should include:

- Development of and periodic practice of Evacuation Plans. (WHS Policy)
- Assignment of school duties and checklist in the case of a Serious Incident.
- Regular discussion of potential hazards during housekeeping meetings
- Emergency details for local police, fire and ambulance.
- Action Plan for serious incidents.
- Provision to access support services for affected community members.
- Being prepared to provide a response to the media in liaison with CSO.
- Provision of assistance to students with special needs.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF AIMS

- Ongoing professional development of staff regarding serious incident management.
- Sufficient funds, will be made available for resources and PD in this area.
- At the time of the serious incident, implementation of a Serious Incident Plan for:
  I. Immediate action
  II. Additional action (within 24-72 hours)
  III. Follow up (72 hours- 1 to 2 weeks)
  IV. Post Crisis (Long Term)

For step by step guide see Appendix A
THE SERIOUS INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM (SIMT)

The Serious Incident Management Team at St Patrick’s (SIMT) will consist of Principal, Assistant Principal, Admin Coordinator, REC and other staff as required.

NB: As at September 2016 –

Principal – Peter Green
Assistant Principal – Ben McCarthy
Admin Coordinator- Bronwyn Sartori
REC- Nicki Graham

Other staff relevant to the serious incident at hand (as determined by the principal)

The Parish Priest and school psychologist should be made aware that they may be called upon to assist at some stage during the serious incident management process.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SIMT

The Principal (or delegate) is the director of the SIMT. They will oversee the planning and implementation of the response to the serious incident.

The SIMT is responsible for:

- A coordinated and appropriate response to all serious incidents.
- The establishment and dissemination of the facts in a clear, accurate and controlled manner.
- Ensuring the school continues to operate in an orderly fashion with an obvious need for flexibility as required.
- Provide essential support during and after the serious incident for students and staff.
- Monitoring of the longer-term needs arising from the serious incident and acting appropriately when necessary.
RESPONSE TO A SERIOUS INCIDENT

All members of the SIMT need to urgently meet in order to plan an appropriate response to the serious incident.

Responsibilities will be assigned to relevant staff members and it will determine the actions required and timelines for doing so. Immediate implementation of the plan must take place.

Refer to Appendix A for detailed response plan to serious incident

Refer to Appendix B for Serious Incident Phone Tree

ROLE OF PRINCIPAL (Principal will also become the Media Liaison Person)

1. Contact emergency Services
2. Assume role of Media Officer in liaison with CSO
3. Contact/Convene Crisis Coordination Team
4. Find facts
5. Contact CSO and Maintain Contact (Send Reports)
6. Contact Immediate Family (news of death should not be given by phone)
7. Letter to parents

The initial letter to parents should be sent out as soon as practicable following the Critical Incident. The letter may incorporate the following:

- Statement of facts – with family permission
- Explanations of levels of care offered to students
- Notification of funeral arrangements – if appropriate and with family permission
- Statement of sympathy and grief by school
- Prayer
- Encouragement that attendance and a return to normal routine are important as a way of establishing stability and security.

8. Liaise with family in regard to an appropriate statement to the media
9. Brief staff and students that all requests from the media are directed to the Principal
10. Prepare a media statement in conjunction with the CSO
11. Prepare a phone response to the media in conjunction with the CSO
12. Prepare a phone response to inquiries and offers of support

ORGANISATION COORDINATOR

The Assistant Principal will assume this role. Much of this role involves communication to key personnel and facilitating change to normal routines. The aim is to create a balance whereby the school functions as normally as possible while still providing the support mechanisms required.

Generally students can be in one of three places.

1. Normal classes
2. The Church
3. Counselling Areas

It is not advisable to allow students to gather in groups in the playground while lessons are on. The appropriate teachers are released from class to supervise and support the students in the Counselling Area since this person best knows the students and their needs.

POSSIBLE TASKS

1. Make appropriate changes to timetables, bells and classrooms.
2. Arrange for Relief Staff to replace key personnel as required. Staff should be briefed if they are unaware of the Critical Incident.
3. Organise roster of supervision of students
4. Maintain normal routines as much as possible
5. Make changes to class rolls as required
6. Designate counselling/reflection areas for staff and students where necessary eg. Library, Church, Interview rooms

STAFF COORDINATOR (Nominated and supported by Organisation Coordinator)

Following a Critical Incident in a school it is often the staff who are the most difficult to support and care for. Many teachers feel the need to continue to carry out their normal routine regardless of the emotional trauma they may be experiencing. This is of course reinforced at some level by the school’s very real need to provide as much normalcy as possible. Some staff may feel that it is inappropriate to seek counselling support at school. It is important to keep staff updated with information but not to further traumatisate them. Choice is important. Staff should be made aware of external counselling services and how these can be accessed.

As deemed appropriate, staff may be offered participation in a formal Debrief, conducted by an external facilitator. This should not be compulsory.

POSSIBLE TASKS:

1. Inform all staff (teaching and support staff) by phone or in person. Tree phone groups re-assigned if necessary.
2. Prepare guidelines for Class groups.
3. Notify local schools if appropriate.
4. Explain to Class teachers that they will be replaced if they wish.
5. Monitor absenteeism list so that absent students can be informed appropriately
6. Organise for daily Debriefs after school for first three days
7. Organise venue and notes for Debrief and inform all staff
8. Encourage attendance by all staff
9. Provide information to staff about counselling services available to them
10. Contact external facilitator for formal Debrief (Approx. one hour)
11. Discuss with classroom teachers the need to deal with seating arrangements if this is an issue
12. Examine long-term professional development needs of staff
13. Contact Counsellors for support – gauge time commitment
14. Individually interview those directly related to the Critical Incident (Consider legalities)
15. Organise daily Debrief for Counsellors

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR**

The Religious Coordinator’s role is one of support and religious guidance. The Church provides a place where students can quietly reflect upon their feelings. At times those students deeply affected by the Critical Incident will move from the Church to a Counselling Area. The REC can make this room more conducive to respectful grieving by the use of appropriate music, candle prayer. It is often where students will write their own prayers. Although there is a supervising adult and a record of attendance, the adult’s role is not to counsel. Extremely distressed students should be directed to the counsellors or other supportive adults in the school.

The involvement of the students in the preparation of liturgies can be very therapeutic as it offers the young people a task, which is reflective, positive, useful and future focused.

**In the Case of a Death**

Attendance at the funeral can also be a very confronting experience for students but it can signify an important step in their grieving process. It is helpful to prepare students for what to expect at the funeral as for some it may be their first experience of a funeral. The school should not make the funeral compulsory. Some students will find it comforting to write letters to the deceased, often with the unsaid things and the expressions of regret.

It is advisable to remember the anniversary of the young person’s death and to conduct a liturgy of remembrance.

**POSSIBLE TASKS:**

1. Liaise with Parish Priest
2. Liaise with family relating to their wishes
3. Establish appropriate environment for Prayer/Reflection Area
4. Prepare prayers for staff and students
5. Prepare with the students and facilitate school liturgies
6. Liaise with the family in preparation for the funeral
7. Prepare a letter to go home to all parents about the funeral arrangements in consultation with the Principal
8. Liaise with the AP / REC about students who are to represent to school at the funeral service and parent permission
9. Brief students for what to expect at the funeral
10. Remember anniversaries
11. Organise a closure ritual
12. Organise follow up. Grief and loss speaker

STAFF

It is helpful to prepare for staff an “AT RISK” list of students who may be more vulnerable following a critical incident. In the case of a death of a student the list would include students who have suffered recent loss, have experienced some form of depression or other psychological problems or who are unable to cope appropriately due to an intellectual or learning difficulty.

As the days progress the students who have sought counselling or are on the “AT RISK” list need to be carefully monitored. It may be helpful to have an ongoing “vulnerability list”. The parents of High Risk students need to be contacted with a recommendation for counselling from either the school counsellor or an external agency or private practitioner. The ongoing monitoring of these students is one of the most significant roles of the Critical Incident response. In the case of suicide there is very real evidence of a contagion effect.

If there are external Counsellors supporting the Critical Incident response, it is helpful to have a daily debrief meeting. This can serve a number of purposes:

1. To communicate concern over particular students
2. To case conference and problem solve some of these concerns
3. To reflect upon the school community’s ability to manage
4. To unload after what can be very demanding crisis interviewing

For the person who is appointed Coordinator for the particular Critical Incident it is recommended that they seek professional support from Catholic Care Social Services, Mayfield.

In the case of youth suicide, counselling the survivors can be an enormous task both in its severity and longevity. Ongoing supervision, establishing boundaries and balancing work with other aspects of one’s life are paramount to the care of oneself.

POSSIBLE TASKS:

1. Prepare an outline for announcement in conjunction with the Staff Coordinator (Assistant Principal) where necessary, involve outside expert, e.g. legal issue
2. Prepare ‘Vulnerability map’ and list of possible ‘at risk’ students in consultation with staff
3. Consult with staff over the preparation of a prayer/reflection
4. Organise a log to record names
5. Prepare Counselling Area
6. Organise for a staff member to act as a liaison person in the Counselling Area
7. Ensure the names of all students being seen by a Counsellor are recorded
8. Phone contact to the parents of students most at risk
PARENT SUPPORT GROUP

The school may wish to establish a special parent support group for those parents most closely affected by the incident. For these parents they may be experiencing their own trauma through increased over protectiveness, anxiety and sleep disturbance. They may feel powerless in how to best support and understand their children’s reactions.

In the long term the school needs to reflect upon the education needs of the general parent body. These may reflect some of the issues which surround the Critical Incident – Drug and Alcohol Education, Child Safety, Mental Health, Communication. The school needs to explore presenters with the most expertise in the area. Often a Critical Incident in a school community creates renewed energy for Parent Education.

Possible Tasks:

1. Assess
2. Ascertain school support and grief/trauma reactions
3. Return any general phone inquiries from parents
4. Provide comprehensive list of Community Support Services
5. Arrange visit to affected families by Support/Counsellor
6. Arrange Parent Support Evening with facilitator from Catholic Schools Office or Catholic Care Social Services
7. Consider need for Parent Education for all Parents

MEDIA LIAISON PERSON

Media Management and response to phone inquiries in consultation with CSO

1. Have a one voice policy to all media requests. This would normally be the Principal.
2. Prepare answers to the following:
   o What happened?
   o Why did the incident occur?
   o What is the school doing about it?
   o How does the school feel about it?
3. Return all calls from the media
4. Some things to be avoided
   o Don’t speculate
   o Don’t ignore the media
   o Don’t say ‘no comment’ or ‘off the record’
   o Don’t distort the facts to look good
   o Don’t ramble
   o Don’t release the names of any deaths unless the next of kin/parents give permission
5. Provide an instruction sheet by the phones in the main administration area. If it is a request from the media determine the nature of the media inquiry, note the name of the journalist, phone number and organisation.
6. If it is someone offering support of some kind
   o Thank the caller for their concern
 GUIDELINES FOR THE FIRST STAFF MEETING FOLLOWING A SERIOUS INCIDENT. ALL STAFF, TEACHING AND NON TEACHING MUST ATTEND

1. Provide a clear, factual account of the Incident. Maintain confidentiality.
2. Inform procedures for the announcement of the Incident to the School Community.
   - Facts
   - Prayer
   - Procedures for the Day and Support Services
   - Encouragement to seek Counselling Support
   - Directions concerning contact with the Media
   - Importance of School attendance
3. Reassure staff that they will deal with students at their level of comfort. If anyone feels unable to undertake their normal duties they will be replaced.
4. Request that Staff refer any ‘At Risk’ students to the Executive Staff. Students who do not feel comfortable seeing a counsellor should be encouraged to consider other supportive adults in the school who they feel they could talk to.
   - Students most ‘At Risk’ may be those who
     - Have experienced some loss in the recent past
     - Have experienced some emotional, psychological problems
     - Have particular learning needs and need assistance in processing
   - In the case of a student or staff member’s death consider those who
     - Had a close relationship with the deceased
     - Had disagreements with the deceased
5. Explain to the teachers that children often grieve longer and more intermittently than adults. It is not unusual to see them crying and then shortly after, laughing. At times these responses can be interpreted as being unusual.

 GUIDELINES FOR CLASS TEACHERS

1. Mark roll and record absentees. When absentees return to school makes sure students are fully briefed.
2. Follow instructions from the Principal regarding information to be given.
3. Do not make comment to the media or any other outside inquiries. All inquiries to be directed to the Principal
4. Some things to avoid:
   - Don’t speculate
   - Don’t distort the facts to look good
5. Don’t ramble
   Reassure students that all will return to a state of normalcy. Reassure students that support structures are in place. Students needing assistance may seek out an adult with whom they are comfortable.

6. Be sure to communicate concerns about students to SIMT
7. Be alert to students who have medical conditions as these may be heightened by trauma, e.g. Diabetics, asthmatics.
8. Keep informed of the daily routine
9. Be aware that professional assistance is available
10. Staff members need to be prepared to hear some unusual questions. Try to respond to them with warmth and understanding. Redirect discussions toward the notion of support. Model that the Incident is serious but try to maintain as much normal routine as possible.

**REPORTING**

A Serious Incident Report Form (*Appendix C*) is to be completed by the principal (or delegate) within 24 hours of the incident.

The SIMT will organise debriefing to:

1. Evaluate response procedures;
2. Establish recommendations for managing future serious incidents &
3. Identify professional development or training needs that may need to be addressed as a result of the incident.

A “Serious Incident Follow up” report must be completed by the principal (or delegate) for every serious incident.

This report will include the following details:

1. Date, time and nature of the incident
2. The chronological series of events, actions and communications
3. Names of staff/students involved
4. A Communication Log (*Appendix D*)
5. Evaluation and recommendations as per the SIMT debriefing (refer to EVALUATION AND REVIEW)
6. A copy of the Serious Incident Report Form
7. Notes from any meetings of the SIMT during and after the incident
8. Copy of any documents produced as a result of the incident

**EVALUATION AND REVIEW**

If a serious incident occurs, the SIMT should meet afterwards to debrief and evaluate the effectiveness of the management plan enacted. Modifications need to be made as required. An important element of this is the Serious Incident Report.
In order for a comprehensive evaluation process to take place, feedback must be gathered from staff, students and members of the wider St Patrick’s School community.

An evaluation report will be written by the Principal (or delegate) and made available to staff.
Serious Incident Management – Step by Step

Immediate Action

☐ Serious Incident occurs

☐ Principal is notified

☐ Principal notifies Emergency Services & Director

☐ Principal assembles Serious Incident Management Team (SIMT)

☐ Principal prepares statement and phone tree enacted

☐ Nominate a SIMT to manage all incoming/outgoing calls

☐ Principal meets with staff (if in school time). Advise of incident and instruct not to talk to media

☐ Contact families of victims. Personal visit? Flowers/condolences?

☐ Advise students in groups and instruct not to talk to media (if in school time)

☐ Communicate with parents

☐ Arrange relief teaching and supervision of students if necessary

Additional Action within 24-72 hours (tick when actioned)

☐ Keep staff, students and families updated with new information

☐ Establish Support Structures within the School: Liturgy, Prayer Space, Counselling
Follow Up 72 Hours – 1 to 2 weeks (tick when actioned)

- Monitor reactions and provide support and opportunities for debriefing
- Keep a note of condolences
- Continue to arrange relief teachers as required
- Is a school memorial service necessary?
- Inform community of funeral arrangements and organise attendance
- Report any notifiable incidents to SafeWork NSW.

Post Crisis – Long term (tick when actioned)

- Has debriefing taken place? Arrange ongoing support as required
- Implement processes to monitor students once school resumes normal operations
- Monitoring and maintaining memorials
- Note any unexpected anniversaries (birthdays etc). What will be done to mark anniversaries?
- Be aware of any ongoing media attention. Ensure staff and students are supported and understand the process.
- Establish when SIMT will meet to evaluate the serious incident response
- Continue liaison with outside agencies
SERIOUS INCIDENT PHONE TREE

LEVEL 1

PRINCIPAL → CSO - Assistant Director
who will inform the Director & Coordinator
Student Wellbeing

LEVEL 2

Assistant Principal  RE Coordinator  School Counsellor

LEVEL 3

- Teaching Staff
- Administration and Support Staff
- List staff names

Principal notifies Level 2 staff and CSO.  Level 2 notifies Level 3 staff listed

ADVICE FOR PHONING STAFF FOLLOWING A SERIOUS INCIDENT

- Prepare a written statement of the facts, which has been approved by the Principal and the family involved
- Discourage discussion about what is not known and explain that a more detailed explanation will be given at staff briefing
- Notify staff of the meeting time and place
- Be clear that no staff member is to speak to the media. Any contact is to be directed to the Principal
- Do not leave a message on answering machines or with young children, other than to contact me as soon as possible
- While expressing deep concern try to convey a message of control and calmness
- Any staff on leave need to be notified in the most appropriate manner
- Update the staff at regular intervals
- Avoid texting
Serious Incident Report Form

Date of incident: ____________________ Time of incident: ____________________

Incident was first reported by: _____________________________________________
Incident was first reported to: _____________________________________________

Location of incident: _____________________________________________________

Names of individual/s affected by incident and contact numbers:

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Description of incident: (succinct summation of the incident, including relevant information prior to the incident and any witnesses)
**Actions taken:** (Description of the action taken in chronological sequence. Include details of any people or agencies informed with contact details. Attach any relevant supporting documents)

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<td>Contact details:</td>
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<td>Attach supporting documents</td>
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<td>People informed:</td>
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Name of person completing report: ________________________________

Signed: __________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________
## Communication Log

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# Serious Incident Contact List

## School Executive Contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
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<tbody>
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## Dial 0 for an Outside Line

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency Fire / Police / Ambulance</td>
<td>000</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Emergency Service (SES)</td>
<td>132 500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police - Belmont</td>
<td>49228899</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire Brigade – Swansea</td>
<td>000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambulance</td>
<td>000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospital – John Hunter, Belmont</td>
<td>4921 3000</td>
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<td></td>
<td>49232000</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Emergency Services</td>
<td>132 500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poisons Information</td>
<td>131 126</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpreting Service</td>
<td>131 450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Cover</td>
<td>131 050</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family and Community Services</td>
<td>49851666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>4979 1120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Vincent de Paul Swansea</td>
<td>49722013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army – Belmont North</td>
<td>49459379</td>
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Staff Meeting Agenda - Sample

The following sample staff meeting agenda can be adapted by the SIMT to fit the protocol developed in a particular school.

1. **ATTENDANCE** - all staff (staff who are not present should be informed of the serious incident as soon as possible following the meeting). Notify Assistant Director, School Counsellor, Parish Priest and others as required.

   The meeting is conducted by the SIMT Team Coordinator (if one has been allocated), or the principal, and should be held as soon as possible.

2. Provide as much **FACTUAL** information as possible including:
   - Names of the students or staff members directly involved
   - Time and place of the event
   - Any additional information surrounding the event
   - Names and location of the siblings directly affected and any other links made e.g. neighbouring school/s, community, sporting groups etc.

3. **INTRODUCE** and communicate the roles/tasks of the SIMT.

   Allow staff an opportunity to express their own reactions and emotional responses. The SIMT may identify staff that may need additional support and following the meeting, refer them to appropriate resources and support.

4. **COMMUNICATE** the school response plan.
   - Prepare and support staff to communicate with their students in relation to the serious incident. Arrange coverage for any staff who are unable to carry out this task. Encourage teachers to allow time for classroom discussion
     - Give directions and model how students should be assisted
     - Have a script for each staff member informing students of the serious incident
     - Provide staff with some information to assist with the process such as Guide for Roll Call/Class Teachers and Serious Incident Support Information for Teachers contained in the Phase 2 sample documents p.15 - 16
   - Communicate to staff some possible responses to express <grief/worry/anxiety>:
     - Feelings: sadness, confusion, anger, guilt
     - Thoughts: disbelief, confusion
     - Responses: crying, withdrawn, tiredness, loss of focus, loss of appetite
     - Some will show no response to the event
   - Identify, support and document students who may be at risk or require additional support
   - Outline procedures for students who want to leave the classroom. Students should be accompanied to the counselling team/quiet area where staff is present. Students who wish to leave the school should only be released to a parent/guardian.
   - Inform staff of any outside support staff or others who will be assisting
   - Inform staff of the availability of counselling support for staff and students
     - Identify counselling staff and inform staff of where students should go to access counselling,
     - Clarify the process of counselling assistance for staff members including EAP (Employee Assistance Program
   - Communicate media protocol
   - Inform all staff of any changes to the regular school schedule or cancellation of normal school events
5. Set the date and time of a FOLLOW UP MEETING (if required)
   • Assure staff that they will be kept informed of any relevant information at this meeting.
   • Follow up meeting will provide an opportunity for staff members to review the events.
   • The meeting may cover:
     o A verbal appreciation of the staff
     o Review the challenges and successes
     o Debrief, share experiences, express concerns and ask questions
     o Check in with staff to assess for additional support
     o Provide information
     o Discuss plans for the next day/s
     o Remind staff of the importance of self-care
Announcement Guide for Roll Call/Class - Teachers Sample

<Date>

1. Tell the students the official information as written on the STAFF FACT SHEET

2. If you are asked for clarification, simply repeat the part of the information that is relevant to the question

3. It is important not to add further discussion at this point

4. Suggest that we do hear of tragedy/disasters, but we never expect it in our own lives.

5. Point out that <grief/or feeling upset or anxious> is a normal response and people express it in many different ways.

6. Try to be mindful of how you express yourself to your students - use statements that are empathic. If you feel at a loss for words it doesn’t matter.

7. Talk about the recent events and the person(s) affected/involved. Ask students to think about how we can offer support.

8. **TELL THEM THE PLAN FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE DAY**
   a) After roll call, normal classes will resume and normal participation is expected
   b) There will be staff supervision in the library - the “reflective space” at this time
   c) Remind them to look after each other

9. **CONCLUDING PRAYER**

   *We pray for ourselves, that each of us may come to love the life that You have given us, And in living that life to the full,*

   *We might come to see Your Glory. We ask you this in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

To conclude, let us join together in the words of the Lord’s Prayer: Our

Father .............
Staff Fact Sheet for Serious Incident Sample

<Date>

Please refer to the information below when addressing students in roll call or your classes today. It is important that we all deliver the same story.

You have been informed that one of our <staff/student/parents>, <name> <died/other> on <details to be provided>.

If students feel they need to discuss their feelings or take time out they need to go to the <Library> and let their class teacher know before leaving class. They should be accompanied by another student. Once they get to the <Library> they will be given the support they need. We will have extra counsellors who will be working from the <Library>. Students sometimes like to visit a counsellor on their own, and occasionally in a small group. We will also have provision for students who would like to draw, write poetry, etc. Coloured pencils and paper will be available in the <Library>.

There will be a book placed in the <Church> in which students may wish to leave a prayer or message. The <Church> will be open for the rest of the week where students may come for quiet time or prayer. There will be staff supervision.

All staff who are free, particularly today – we would appreciate your generosity in ensuring there is adequate supervision in the <Library and the Church>. Thank you in anticipation for this.

<Teacher’s name> has organised for extra casual teachers to be on deck for the whole day today, to assist with any necessary lessons.

Any students who appear very distressed in your classes may be directed by you to go to the <Library or the Front Office > so that parents can be called if students wish to go home. You should nominate another student to accompany the child.

Please do not make judgements about a student’s emotional state: merely give them the choice to go to the <Library or Church>, or to suggest that they might like to go home. Please monitor students in your classes for signs of distress and refer them to the <Front Office> or to <Staff member’s name>.

There are prayers that are available for your use.

<Principal’s Name>
Guide to communicate to students and staff - SAMPLE

The manner in which a serious/critical incident is announced to the students can have a major impact on the emotional responses of the whole school community. Before making the announcement of a traumatic event, such as an accident or sudden death, which is not already widely known in the school or community, the Principal should consider some important issues:

- Ensure the families’ right to privacy is respected
- Make the announcement simultaneously so that all students will hear about it at the same time
- Reduce potential for creating a highly charged emotional climate by informing students in their regular classroom setting
- Carefully word the content of the announcement and provide written copies to all teachers to use in their classrooms
- Gauge the reactions of the student body and respond appropriately

MAKING THE ANNOUNCEMENT

- Use a simple statement of condolence. Respect the wishes of the family. Use discretion and be as truthful as possible when responding to the questions. Be mindful that early information may not be accurate.
- Do not use the public address system or an assembly to inform students or staff of a serious incident. It is not possible to gauge individual student reactions in a large group.
- After the announcement in the classroom, assure students that they will be kept informed with information as it becomes is available.

SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENTS

After a suspected suicide

Today the school was given the very sad news that (name), one of our students died by suicide. We are all thinking about his/her family and friends. Some students in our schools, particularly his/her friends in his Year ?, will find this very difficult to understand and accept. Other students, not just close friends, are also likely to be upset because perhaps it reminds them of another sad event in their own life. Because of this a quiet space has been set up for any students who feel that cannot be in the classroom over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times. The School Psychologist/Counsellor will be available to see students and we may have some extra School Psychologist/Counsellors in the school, for a while. A letter is going home today to inform your parents about the death so that they will understand that you may want to talk to them sometime today or in the near future. Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds, and if you are approached by anyone from outside the school asking for information about this death, please tell them that they should speak with …… This is a time to be especially sensitive to people’s feeling and look out for each other. Let a teacher or your parent know if you are worried about anything or anyone.

After a known fatality

Today the school was given the very sad news that (name), one of our students has died. We are all praying for his/her family and friends. Some students in our schools, particularly his/her friends in his Year, may find this very difficult. Other students not just close friends are also likely to be upset because perhaps it reminds them of another sad event in their own life. Because of this a quiet space has been set up for any students who feel they cannot be in class over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times. The School Psychologist/Counsellor will be available to see students and we may have some extra psychologists in the school, for a while. A letter is going home today to inform your parents about the death so that they will understand that you may want to talk to them sometime today or in the future. Be sensitive.
to people’s feelings about this death, look out for each other and let a teacher or your parent know if you are worried about anything or anyone

**After a natural or man-made disaster**

*After a natural or man-made disaster* *(When) (name of school) was destroyed/partially destroyed by (serious incident/ fire, vandalism).*

Include a statement about fatalities’ or injuries that occurred.

Emergency services are investigating the serious incident and will provide more information once known. We will let you know any facts that are communicated to us as soon as possible. Include information about any changes to the school routine.

*Two important messages to promote are that all of us should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable, and that children/young people should tell an adult if they are worried about a friend.*

Our school will be concentrating on supporting our students and staff over the next days/months. This means, among other things, returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible and recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come.

If you son/daughter is already using the services of a mental health professional, you may pass on this information to them.

Please feel free to contact the following staff for information about the school’s support plan or if you have any concerns about your son/daughter. Contacting the *(insert staff member)* is an important way of ensuring you receive consistent and accurate information and for us to be aware of all parent concerns

Please pray for *<name>* and take strength in our Christian belief in God’s love. We wish that *<name>*’s family may find comfort and strength in God’s love, our faith and the support of the *<Name of School Community>*.
Supporting Staff

Too often, staff considers the wellbeing of the students at a cost to their own wellbeing. It is important to consider the support needs of staff and to monitor and respond to their wellbeing at regular intervals.

Staff (including the SIMT) should be encouraged to prioritise their own wellbeing and to ask for respite, support or a change in role if they need it. Staff with good mental health will assist the school in returning to normal routines and help students to feel well supported and cared for.

Staff duties relating to the incident may need to be rotated to relieve staff stress.

The SIMT will monitor staff for obvious signs of distress, respond and refer the staff to the school’s executive. Regular meetings and opportunities to debrief are important as well as awareness of referral processes to appropriate professional support such as the EAP (Employee Assistance Program). This also includes staff who are members of the SIMT.

It is important for staff who have been effected/traumatised by the serious incident to be identified and supported. These staff may need to be supported/replaced when students are initially informed or when there are facilitated discussions about the serious incident. Staff responses can have the ability to influence student perceptions and recovery from a serious incident.

The SIMT should consider what support is needed to assist the school to maintain normal routines. Schools may assist staff managing the difficult time by arranging additional support staff, School Psychologist/Counsellors as well as casual teachers. Remember to consider relieving the administration staff as well.

In the event that there is more than one serious incident that occurs in a school over a period of time, it should be anticipated that there will be staff and students who will return to their earlier levels of distress/grief and therefore require their earlier levels of support and monitoring. This may also be the case with anniversaries and other significant dates and events.

The School Psychologist/Counsellor has available various resources for supporting students, families and staff following a serious incident.
Self-Care for School Staff

Following a serious incident, it is normal for people to react in varied ways and experience different emotions. Grief and shock are common when loss is experienced. It can also elicit a range of other complex emotions which can influence people’s behaviour and ability to cope. Serious incidents can be a difficult time for school staff as they are often dealing with their own grief and supporting students at the same time.

It is important for staff to be aware of their own needs and to seek additional support when required. This safeguards staff wellbeing and will help to support students. If the serious incident has been a traumatic event, there are some common responses experienced by people and ways to take care of yourself.

Staff can look after themselves following a serious incident by:

- **Seeking out the schools support team:** This may be the SIMT/welfare staff, School Psychologist/Counsellor for referral information, school pastoral care worker, Employee Assistance Program. Some people prefer to use professional services such as those listed, other people may feel that seeking out support from colleagues, friends and family is what they need.

- **Debriefing with an external mental health professional** – who can offer a different type of support to family and friends in helping staff understand what they are experiencing.

- **Monitoring their own reactions and taking care of their own needs:** Some people notice changes in their behaviour for some time following a traumatic incident which may include withdrawal from others, increased irritability, difficulty sleeping and concentrating; confusion, restlessness and low energy. Staff may need a break from the classroom or direct contact with students or ask for more support.

- **Planning ahead where possible to manage difficult situations in the classroom/school:** It is important for the school and staff to acknowledge that this may be a difficult time and harder to manage certain situations e.g. disruptive students, increased demands from parents. Staff will benefit in being aware of what these situations are for them, managing them differently and/or asking for support.

- **Maintaining structure and routine in the classroom:** Managing time effectively – by allowing enough time to complete tasks and not taking on extra responsibility.

- **Taking some time out:** It may be detrimental for staff and their students, to continue in their role if they are not coping. A conversation with the school principal to explore options may be beneficial.

- **Using positive coping strategies and avoid unhealthy coping strategies:** Challenging unhelpful thinking, “I should have…”; relaxation/meditation and our Catholic values and beliefs may help change perspective and minimise distress. Unhealthy coping strategies such as drugs and alcohol are likely to complicate things and may increase the likelihood of emotional difficulties.

- **Maintaining a healthy work/life balance.** Keeping to stricter working hours and not taking work home, maintaining a healthy diet, exercise and sleep routine is important in feeling able to manage throughout the day.