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## **Critical Incident Policy**

**St Aubyn's (Woodford Green) School Trust**

## **Introduction**

Schools, under normal circumstances, provide a safe and secure environment for all children to learn, develop and grow. Unfortunately, crises or tragedies can occur and can result in significant distress for all individuals involved, as well as for the school as a whole. A school can be affected in a number of ways, for instance, if a pupil or member of staff dies the whole school may feel the loss; or, when pupils who have suffered shock or injury return to school they may need to be treated with particular sensitivity. There are any number of possibilities requiring any number of responses and this policy outlines some of the procedures the School will take if such an incident presents itself.

## **What counts as a Critical Incident?**

There are three levels of incident. These are:

Level 1 – Major incident involving a large number of children/adults e.g. bus/train crash, major violence.

Level 2 – Incident involving death or serious assault or other traumatic incident witnessed by children or staff.

Level 3 – Distress/trauma resulting from an incident such as the sudden death of a teacher or classmate through a road traffic accident for example, but not witnessed by the pupils.

Pupils may be affected by crises that occur either in or out of school.

Here are some examples:

### **In-school**

- the death of a pupil or member of staff through natural causes, such as illness;
- a traffic accident involving a pupil or staff member;
- a deliberate act of violence, such as a knifing or the use of a firearm;
- a school fire or flood;
- allegations or actual incidents of abuse against pupils by staff and staff against pupils;
- an arson attack on the school.

### **Out-of-school**

- deaths or injuries on school journeys, trips or residential trips;
- tragedies involving children from many schools at public events such as football matches;
- civil disturbances;
- Abductions/disappearances;
- a civil disturbance or act of terrorism;
- a disaster in the community;
- a transport accident involving school members

The emotional effects of disasters on children are not always immediately obvious to parents/carers or school staff. Indeed, children can find it difficult to confide their distress to adults as they know that it will

upset them. In some children, the distress can last for months, even years, and may additionally affect their academic attainment.

Some young people may not feel comfortable enough or be able to share their feelings and thoughts in public or with staff either because they are unable to do so or because they fear their confidence may be abused. Similarly, because many adults are not able to talk about death, bereavement and tragedy, they may unwittingly stop children talking about similar emotional experiences.

At St Aubyn's Prep School we take all children's needs seriously, including emotional and psychological, and are committed to ensuring all children receive the help they require to explore such matters as death and significant harm or injury in an environment of trust, care and safety. We also recognise the impact such incidents can have on the wellbeing of staff and parents/ carers and will do our utmost to support any recovery needed and work with any agencies required.

### **Preventative and precautionary measures**

Whilst no amount of planning can prevent accidents and problems occurring, it is hoped that some can be prevented and the effects of others minimised by taking sensible precautionary measures. At St Aubyn's School we expect that:

- Staff and pupils will be familiar with the School's routines for fire and the evacuation of the school building on hearing the fire alarm;
- Staff will be familiar with the routines and procedures for dealing with emergencies (as detailed in this policy);
- Staff and pupils will be familiar with the school's security procedures, in particular, that all visitors not wearing a visitor's badge should be questioned by staff and escorted to the school entrance area;
- Staff organising school trips and visits follow the guidelines and write a risk assessment to be signed off by the Headmaster and Deputy Headmaster;
- Staff will sign in and out of the premises;
- Staff are aware of pupils with medical needs or health problems;
- Staff are aware that they should assess associated risks to children before carrying out the curriculum or other activity;
- Staff are aware that they are responsible for assessing risks to themselves before undertaking an activity.

Additionally, in the event of a critical incident the priorities of those adults in charge of the school or trip will be to:

- Save life;
- Minimise personal injury;
- Safeguard the interests of all pupils and staff;
- Minimise loss and to return to normal working as quickly as possible.

### **Plan to minimise the impact of a crisis**

At St Aubyn's School, we will follow any guidance given by the Local Authority as well as any advice given by the Redbridge or Essex Police. The School's reaction to a critical incident can be divided into the

following categories: a) Immediate action b) Short term action c) Medium-term action d) Longer term action.

**IMMEDIATE ACTION – When a crisis occurs:**

1. Obtain accurate information relating to the incident and relay this to the Headmaster (or Deputy Headmaster in his absence)
2. Ensure staff have an emergency number (mobile) to contact the Headmaster as outside lines may be jammed as a response to any incident outside of the school.
3. The Headmaster should contact the parent/ carer of the child caught in the tragedy and ask them to come into school for a full briefing if this is appropriate. (This may not be appropriate if the parent/ carer needs to go to a hospital if the child has been seriously injured.) Parents/ carers need to be informed of all available facts as early as possible.
4. The Chair of Governors and appropriate officers in the Local Authority will be contacted and notified of the incident so that appropriate assistance can be given.
5. Staff will be informed as early as possible. It may be necessary to relieve the Deputy Headmaster from his duties if he is required to support the careful management of the crisis.
6. Ensure any incoming calls by other parents or agencies are answered. A record of who has phoned should be kept so the school knows who else needs to be contacted (this will be the responsibility of the receptionist).
7. All other parents/ carers should be informed that a significant accident has occurred and the result of this may be that their child will be upset.
8. A telephone call will be made to inform our neighbouring schools that an incident of significance has occurred.
9. No member of staff other than the headmaster, bursar or member of the Governing Body will talk to the media unless previously arranged. Additionally, all parents/ carers and children will be asked not to talk to the media in the best interests of the children, staff and school as a whole. All enquiries will be directed to and through the headmaster, bursar or Governor during a briefing session with the press.
10. Pupils will be informed of what has happened in a factual but sensitive way so to avoid any misunderstanding. It is preferable to do this as classes so that children can ask any questions they may have. Facts only will be shared, and staff will not share any personal comments or speculations. They will be told as close to the time that parents/ carers are informed.
11. School routines will continue (as far as possible). This is to ensure the children feel secure and know there is stability in school.
12. If the incident has resulted in death, the headmaster will enquire as to the burial customs of the family (some religions hold their funeral services within 24 hours of death). For instance, this will include whether sending flowers is appropriate.

## **SHORT TERM ACTION**

Once it is confirmed that St Aubyn's School is facing a major crisis, the School will:

1. Ensure children receive any medical or first aid support they require and that they are physically safe from any further harm.
2. Ensure children are reunited with their families as soon as practicable. If necessary, organise for families to be taken to their children.
3. Ensure all staff, teaching and non-teaching, have an opportunity to express their emotional reactions to the crisis.
4. Make contacts with other professionals and organised support for any member of staff or child who requires professional help. The Headmaster has responsibility for ensuring that the right professional support is in place for the children. If appropriate, set up a regular support group, counselling sessions and someone who will monitor and access the children's and/or staff's needs and their well-being.
5. Organise for appropriate agencies or the local clergy to come into school to talk to all the children in assemblies if this is required or deemed to be helpful.
6. After a few days or when deemed appropriate, organise for a designated person in School to be available to listen to any of the children's reflections, thoughts and feelings on the prior events. If a child feels more comfortable talking to another member of staff, this will be acknowledged and organised.
7. If a child or a group of children have been personally affected by the incident, all other children need to be given time to make cards and send messages as appropriate.
8. Staff need to be aware that children may show a reaction in their play and learning and that this can be a normal reaction to significant events. Staff need to make observation notes and keep careful records of any behaviour that is unusual for the child. These should be shared with the parent and the Headmaster must be informed.
9. Organise a debriefing session for children and staff by an experienced person from outside the school. This is to ensure:
  - there is clarification about what has happened
  - there is an opportunity for everyone to share and talk about their reaction to what has happened
  - give reassurance
  - mobilise resources
10. The Headmaster will contact the families of those who have been hurt or bereaved and express sympathy and give support.

## **MEDIUM TERM ACTION**

Careful and sensitive planning is required to ensure pupils, staff and the whole school community recover as quickly as possible and that stability is recreated. At St Aubyn's School we will:

1. Make sensitive arrangements for the return to school which may include:

- the possibility of part time or flexible attendance
- preparing re-entry into the class
- ensuring the curriculum is well thought through
- a catch up package is planned
- organising visits by the class teacher and friends to give confidence and a clear message of a support network at school
- set up 'sanctuary' arrangements for any pupil if they feel upset or become overwhelmed by the recent events

2. Arrange alternative teaching if necessary (the pupil may have difficulties concentrating or writing and this will need to be considered by staff)

3. Arrange support for affected staff. Staff may need to have their own needs met, and the Headmaster will contact any appropriate outside consultants or agencies to assist with this. Advice will always be sought from Health or Local Authority personnel.

4. Decide about attendance at funerals. This will usually be the Headmaster, the Chair of Governors and other members of staff if available.

5. A special assembly or memorial service will be planned to allow the whole school community to acknowledge the events and to ensure there is a moving on from these if this is deemed appropriate.

#### **LONGER TERM ACTION**

At St Aubyn's School, we recognise that the effect of any crisis can last for many years. The following will be considered:

1. Introduce strategies to continue monitoring the most vulnerable pupils and staff. All new members of staff will be informed of the events that took place and will, additionally, have access St Aubyn's School Critical Incident Policy. New staff will additionally know how to obtain further help if this is necessary.

2. Consult and decide on whether and how to mark the anniversary of the event.

#### **Curriculum planning for serious injury, death and bereavement**

##### **Multi-cultural and multi-faith issues**

At St Aubyn's School, we recognise that we need to have a clear understanding of all of our pupils' backgrounds. This includes having an informed understanding of different cultural and religious attitudes to disability, disasters, death, bereavement, mourning and funerals. Such awareness of diverse views and expectations contributes towards creating a supportive ethos within the school. We aim to discuss these as part of our focus on Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural learning (SMSC) which is central to our curriculum.

We continue to strive to deliver a curriculum that best prepares all of our young people for situations they will face during their lives. We value any feedback from children, as well as from parents/ carers. There is always an opportunity to talk to the Headmaster if there are any issues connected with serious injury, death or bereavement which families feel the school needs to be aware of. By working together, it is

hoped that every child will quickly overcome any reaction to critical incidents that they have been involved with, have witnessed or been a part of as part of the school family.

#### **Other aspects**

##### **Multiple staff absence**

There may be an occasion when there is multiple staff absence due to a severe virus, through other illnesses or through the impact of off-site accidents in which several members of the staff have been hurt. If there is insufficient staff to open the school parents will be informed as soon as possible. All possibilities will be considered to ensure the school functions as normally as possible and as soon as possible.

##### **Significant damage to the school premises**

The school will not reopen until all health and safety regulations have been met. We will always put the safety of our children and staff first.

##### **Data security**

We will follow the School's Data Protection Policy on all matters concerning information.