

HIGHVIEW COLLEGE CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

Person Responsible – Principal



Rationale

Crisis Response Procedures are intended to guide staff in responding to a crisis such as deaths of students or teachers and other traumatic events which can affect the school community in an ongoing manner for a period of time. These procedures are intended to be time limited, problem-focused interventions designed to identify and resolve the crisis, restore equilibrium, and support productive responses.

Aims

- To allow the school community to deal efficiently and effectively with a Crisis.
- To utilise expertise personnel in both the immediate and recovery situations.
- To support the school community post crisis particularly those closely involved.

Definition of Crisis

A sudden, generally unanticipated event that profoundly and negatively affects a significant segment of the school population and often involves serious injury or death.

Examples of a crisis may include, but are not limited to:

- Fatality, near fatality within the community
- Murder or suicide involving Highview Community families / or within the wider community.
- Attempted suicide
- A missing student
- A serious road accident (either involvement or witness)
- Physical or sexual assault or threat of attack
- Aggression verbal or psychological
- Severe OH&S risk
- Enforced school closure
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Acts of terrorism
- Major vandalism
- Natural disaster (earthquake, fire, severe storm, extremes in temperature)
- Fire / bomb threat, explosion, gas leak, chemical spill or other environmental hazard
- Major overseas event eg: Bali Bomb

For large scale situations refer to the Highview Emergency Management Plan (Code Red/ Lockdown/Evacuation). Follow up procedures as mentioned in this document will be guidelines for all Crisis events.

Implementation

In the event of a serious accident, sudden death or similar event.

CRISIS CHECKLIST:

1. Direct staff and others not to repeat information until it is verified
2. Notify the Principal
3. Convene Extended Senior Executive and assign duties
4. Contact support (Ministers / Counsellor)
5. Be flexible: Home Group may need to be extended
6. Inform (if needed) closest friends of the affected student and provide support
7. Prepare a formal statement / announcement
8. Announce time and location of emergency staff meeting
9. Identify other additional students / staff and parents likely to be most affected by the news
10. Hold emergency staff briefing
11. Make official announcement
12. As needed, assign co-ordinators to monitor the yard
13. Co-ordinate counselling with ministers / counsellor
14. Co-ordinate safe areas (e.g. Chapel – Set up urn, food and drinks)
15. Reschedule classes from rooms if necessary to provide further areas
16. At the end of the day collect student's belongings from locker
17. Remove student's name on all class rolls
18. Contact Bus Company

Additional information

APPENDIX 1 Symptoms of Reaction to a Crisis or Disaster

APPENDIX 2 Responses

Policy developed by J Wardrop – 2012
Updated by Melinda Scash 2016

APPENDIX 1

SYMPTOMS OF REACTION TO A CRISIS OR DISASTER

First Reactions

- Numbness, shock, difficulty believing what has happened. Physical and mental reactions may be slow or confused.
- Difficulty in decision making. Uncertainty about things.

Ongoing Reaction

- Loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, loss of interest or pleasure in everyday activities.
- Desire to get away from everyone (even family and friends).
- Emotional liability – becoming irritable or upset more quickly than usual.
- Feelings of fatigue, hopelessness, helplessness.
- Digestive problems, headaches or backaches.
- Difficulty in accepting that the crisis has had an impact or accepting support from friends and the community.

Symptoms of Reaction to a Crisis or Disaster (teenager)

- Excessive concern for others, guilt, anxiety and insecurity.
- Sleeplessness or wanting to sleep all the time.
- Withdrawal from family, spending increased time alone listening to music or watching TV.
- Wanting to be around the family more than before or more dependent on family or other people.
- Sudden need for independence expressing feelings like 'don't treat me like a child' and 'you're only my Mother'.
- Unco-operative, irritable and only concerned with what is important to them.
- Bored, listless and dissatisfied.
- Unable to cope with responsibilities or duties, reverting to immature or other irresponsible behaviour.
- Preoccupation with the trauma, wanting to talk about it all the time – or angrily refusing to talk about it.
- More detached from life, the future or interests, and an unwillingness to set goals.
- Want to do everything now; they are impatient or intolerant.
- Pessimism and cynicism, loss of interest in the future.
- Changed values and philosophy of life.
- Poor concentration, memory, organisation, planning skills and reduced school performance.
- Restlessness, always needing to be doing something or to be with peers.
- Exaggerated emotional reactions to small problems.
- Angry, controlling, assertive and demanding.
- Exaggeration or return of previous problems.

Post-Traumatic Stress Reactions (indicating a need to refer the student to a professional)

Physical
Nausea

Cognitive
Slowed thinking

Emotional
Anxiety

Upset stomach	Difficulty in making decisions	Fear
Tremors (lips and hands)	Difficulty in problem solving	Guilt
Feeling unco-ordinated	Confusion	Grief
Profuse sweating	Disorientation (especially to place and time)	Depression
Chills	Difficulty concentrating	Sadness
Diarrhoea	Difficulty naming common objects	Feeling hurt
Chest Pain (should be checked at hospital)	Seeing the event over and over	Worry about others
Rapid heartbeat	Distressing dreams	Wanting to hide
Rapid breathing	Poor attention span	Wanting to limit contact
Raised blood pressure		Anger
Headaches		Irritability
Muscle aches		Feeling numb
Sleep disturbance		Startled
		Shocked

Suggestions that may be helpful

- Take time to relax and do things that you find enjoyable.
- Getting away for a short time with close friends.
- Follow your regular routine for a while.
- Avoid making changes even if it appears to be positive.
- Get regular exercise.
- Keep your days as simple as possible.
- Avoid taking on any new responsibilities.
- If symptoms of stress persist beyond a few weeks seek professional help.

APPENDIX 2 RESPONSES

Incoming Phone Calls (after the initial period)

Office Staff – manage calls as they come in.

Read a prepared statement that includes:

- Basic details of the incident
- Your child is safe
- How it is being handled i.e. Counselling opportunities

Communication

In Person

Some parents may arrive at the Highview Office to pick up their child.

Office staff tell them only what is on the prepared statement.

Media

All media contact is handled by the Principal as per Highview College Policy.

In response to suicide

- Highview will acknowledge the suicide as a tragic loss of life
- Highview will allow students to attend the funeral or memorial service
- Highview will provide support for students profoundly affected by the death
- Highview will organise a memorial service (in consultation with the parents)
- Highview may create a memorial for that student. Three appropriate ways to remember a student (regardless of means of death):

- Plant something that will grow and flourish
- Memorial rock
- Anniversary book

Plus

- Create a book prize
- Scholarship or trophy
- Have an award
- Donate a musical instrument
- Mounting a photo
- Having a regular assembly/concert
- Annual cricket match
- Annual commemorative run
- Plant a rose and give one to the family
- Ask the students!

It is important to maintain an increased awareness for 'copycat' suicide attempts. Details will not ever be disclosed by Highview College.

Any of our students considered to be especially 'at risk' will be referred to a professional for support.

DRAFT ANNOUNCEMENTS / LETTERS

Initial Announcement of a Crisis Event

From the Principal to the students

We have just been advised of a tragedy involving a member/s of Highview College. I am sad to announce that [Name] has died / been involved in a very serious accident.

As soon as we have more information we will pass it on to you.

There will be staff/ counsellors in the Offices in the Junior Corridor to help those of you who need extra support in dealing with this situation.

As soon as we know the family's wishes regarding [Name's] funeral / memorial service we will share this information with you.

We ask that everyone continue with their regular classes, following their normal timetable today, please.

Let's have a moment of silence to remember [Name].

Our Chaplain [Name] will say a short prayer for [Name] and his/her family.

Suicide Announcement From the Principal to Students

[Name] died by suicide on [Day]. As a school we extend our sympathy to [Name's] family and friends.

We encourage all students to consider the tragic nature of this death and to realise that death is final.

[Name's] death is a reminder to us all that suicide is not a solution to any of life's problems nor is it an act of courage.

Please let your teachers know if you would like to talk with a staff member or counsellor. A Funeral Service for [Name] will be held at [Place] on [Date].

Let's have a moment of silence to remember [Name].

Our Chaplain [Name] will say a short prayer for [Name] and his family.

Death from an Accident or Illness Announcement From the Principal to Students

As many of you are aware, we were sorry to hear that [Name], a student in Year [?] of our school died on [Day] from [Reason].

The funeral arrangements have not been completed. As soon as we receive the funeral details we will announce them.

Those of you who would like to discuss your feelings about [Name's] death should get your planner signed by the class teacher and go to the Deputy Principal's Office (Pastoral Care). There will be counsellors available to talk to you throughout the day.

Let's have a moment of silence to remember [Name].

Our Chaplain [Name] will say a short prayer for [Name] and his family.

Thank you for your co-operation today.

Draft Letters to Parents Notice of a Serious Bus Accident

Dear Parents,

This morning, prior to school, there was an accident involving a school bus and a car. There were known injuries to the passengers in the car. The students on the [NameBus] witnessed the aftermath of the accident, but were not involved in it.

The students from the [NameBus] involved in the accident were taken to the theatre by the Pastoral Care Staff and Administration. The children, although already asked at the scene of the accident, were asked again if they were injured in any way. If so their parents were contacted immediately by the Office Staff. Students were also asked if they wanted their parents to take them home and again some parents were called. Your child may show some delayed reaction to the accident. Please be alert over the next couple of days for symptoms of delayed reaction, including:

- a desire to be alone, unusually quiet
- loss of appetite
- problem with sleeping, nightmares
- difficulty with concentration
- crying
- angry outbursts, short temper
- headaches, upset stomach
- depressed, sad

Your child may also exhibit some physical complaints. Please contact the School Office to fill out an accident report if this is the case. The school will continue to offer counselling services for students needing help dealing with the accident.

Please contact the School Office if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely

Principal

Draft Letter – Student Sudden Death

Dear Parents and Students,

On [Day], [Full Student Name], a Year [?] student at Highview was in a terrible accident. [Name] was hit by a car in [Location] and died instantly.

[Name's] death is a tragic, emotional loss for the whole Highview Community. I am sure all of us will make every effort to comfort and support [name's] family as they attempt to deal with

this traumatic loss. There are no adequate words to express our sense of grief and sympathy for the family.

Because [Name's] death is felt so deeply by so many, on [day] we will be offering ongoing support by our Pastoral Care Staff and Counsellors to discuss this accident and loss with both students and staff.

We encourage you to discuss this loss with your child. In order to help you do so we will be holding a parent meeting on [date] at [time], in the Library, here at Highview. The presentation will provide ways to help children to cope with loss and will be presented by [Name], a local Health Professional.

[Name's] family, friends and the school are suffering deeply. Please join with us as we support [Name's] family with our thoughts and our prayers.

Yours sincerely

Principal