



**HORRIS HILL**  
FOUNDED 1888

# Critical Incident Policy

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## CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

### INTRODUCTION

1. The impact of a major incident involving the School could result in human trauma, the disruption to our core business or both, and the School must be ready to respond with a positive and timely action plan which will minimise the human effect and allow the School to return to routine business as quickly as possible. A situation that is handled poorly has the very real potential to damage the School's reputation and at worst with terminal results. We must therefore be prepared to manage critical incidents in a thoroughly effective way, and this document aims to give guidance on procedures, and on factors involved in the decision-making process, both to the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) and to individuals.
2. The role of the CIMT is to provide leadership and direction for the planning, duration and aftermath of critical incidents. Further details about the CIMT can be found at paragraph 8.
3. The most essential part of Critical Incident Management is the foundation formed by training and pre-thought of all those likely to be involved with, or affected by such an incident. Although we hope that the school will never be involved in a serious incident, some scenarios are more likely to occur than others. The school should identify these scenarios and train effectively for them, so as to minimise their impact on the school community.

### WHAT IS A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

4. Critical Incidents are characterised as events leading to emotional trauma and stress to pupils, staff and parents, or by physical damage to buildings and School property. They are likely to cause a severe disruption in School routine and business, and/or could be the cause of the School's reputation coming under threat. Examples of such incidents could include:

- Murder
- Fatal road traffic accidents
- Hostage taking on School premises
- Terrorist activity involving a threat to life
- Suicide
- Widespread absence, or possibly death, through contagious disease
- Kidnapping from School premises
- Fire
- Major disruption to the business functioning of buildings, facilities or computers
- Civil disaster, such as an air crash
- Missing pupil

### RESPONSE CHARACTERISTICS

5. Dealing with most serious incidents follows three phases and the School's response should be based on separating the requirements of each:
  - a. **The Immediate Reaction.** Gathering information, requesting appropriate support (including: police, fire, ambulance), communicating with all concerned, setting up the CIMT, dealing with the

media.

b. **Handling Human Reaction.** Identifying those individuals in need, recognising the whole-School effect, the subsequent discussion on an incident, the provision of professional support where necessary, and the ritual closure of an incident. This is also known as the emotional phase.

c. **Getting back to business.** Re-establishing routines and facilities as quickly as possible.

#### **KEY ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN SUCCESSFUL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT**

6. **Procedures.** The School should have a simple set of procedures to cover the most likely incidents. We judge these to be:

- Evacuation of the school buildings
- Response to malicious intrusion of the school premises
- Road traffic accident (RTA)
- Major illness
- Death of a child or staff member

These procedures should be clearly understood and practised at least annually by both staff and, where appropriate, pupils, to allow immediate actions to be carried out swiftly and efficiently.

Staff training should cover these procedures at least annually.

Procedures are at Annex A.

7. **Information.** The gathering of accurate and timely information is vital to the management of any incident. Inaccurate or a lack of information can easily lead to confusion, uncertainty and distress; it can seriously damage the PR effort and with it the School's reputation. Responsible persons involved in an incident away from School need to be aware of essential basic information required by the School; in the same way the School needs to know all available facts to initiate onward communication, and for the appropriate reaction to take place effectively. The facts essential to this process are:

- What has happened?
- Where has it happened?
- What time did it happen?
- Name and mobile phone number of member of staff in charge
- Confirm identity of group (and total number, pupils and adults) involved
- Names of those injured and their location (e.g. hospital)
- Damage to vehicles/property etc;
- Who has been informed of the incident?
- What is being done now?
- What assistance is required from the School?

Information needs to be updated and verified on a regular basis; in the case of incidents occurring away from School, the responsible person on the ground and the CIMT must clarify who will conduct any follow-up in this regard to prevent a duplication of effort.

8. **Communication.** Communication is clearly one of the most important elements in dealing successfully with a critical incident and there are several aspects to be considered:

a. **Focal Point Communication.** The principle of focal point communication must be rapidly established at the outset. This ensures that there is only one nominated person on the ground during

an "away" incident, responsible for verifying, recording and passing information. It creates control over others who may wish to communicate with, for example, parents or friends to reassure them, and thus prevents the untimely or inaccurate passage of information. Similarly all staff and pupils must be aware that they should not communicate their perceptions about the incident to anyone, without permission from the CIMT which will provide the focal point in School.

b. **Communication Tree.** Once an incident has been reported and declared critical, it is important to initiate the communication tree with the aim of passing information concurrently and rapidly to those who need to know. The CIMT must allocate telephones to maintain access both in and out of the School. Responsibilities in this respect are as follows:

- Head Parents, Pupils
- Bursar Civil authorities, CIMT, Insurers, HSE, Admin Staff
- Deputy Head Teaching Staff
- Chairman of Governors

c. **Out of Hours.** An incident out of hours is likely to be discovered by living in staff. If the incident is major, the Head and the Deputy Head are to be called immediately at their homes whence they can initiate the communications process.

d. **Continual Communication.** Major incidents rarely conclude quickly, and their effects develop over a period of time. There is always new information to digest which often requires rapid reaction. It is important for the CIMT to establish a communications centre to process this need. The Headmaster's Study will become the communications centre under the control of CIMT which will delegate routine responsibility to the School Secretary. Information received by the communications centre is to be passed to the CIMT for processing, and is to be recorded on log sheets. Parents, Staff and pupils will also need to be regularly appraised on developments. It would not be unusual to hold daily briefings with daily information letters during the period in which the incident is considered critical.

e. **Communication with the Media.** This is considered under a separate section and can be found at Annex B.

9. **Setting up the CIMT.** It is a matter for the Head, Deputy Head or Bursar to determine whether an incident is critical. Procedures for setting up the CIMT, its organisation and its function are contained in Annex C.

10. **Liability and Evidence.** The nature of most incidents exposes a liability, and the School's duty is to attempt to identify where that may lie and to initiate appropriate action. Potentially serious cases may be investigated by the civil authorities, but the School should ensure that up to the time that occurs, evidence is appropriately preserved.

a. **Witnesses.** Witnesses to an incident should be immediately taken to an isolated room where they can give an account of events to one member of staff nominated by the CIMT. Other members of staff should be available to give support to traumatised pupils. Statements may be required by the Police, and indeed they may also need to re-interview witnesses thereafter. The Police will normally expect witnesses to be isolated from each other before providing a statement, however it may be more appropriate to keep pupils together to prevent undue stress following a particularly harrowing incident, for example.

b. **Staff.** Where it appears likely that a member of staff is liable, the CIMT will organise the taking of a statement with union representation available. It would not be unusual for such a member of staff to be traumatised, and appropriate support should be provided.

c. **Evidence.** The scene of an incident should be isolated by ring-fencing as soon as possible, under the direction of the Bursar. Any item which could be considered evidence is to remain untouched in an isolation area. The Bursar is to ensure that evidence is not tampered with, prior to the arrival of the Police.

11. **Handling Reaction.** Experience in schools where critical incidents have occurred, shows that parents, staff and pupils react in a variety of ways that can be characterized within the emotional range of denial, guilt, anger, distress and helplessness. Sensitive handling of these reactions will help to reduce the effect, and will allow the School a quicker return to the routine and business of education. Some key elements to assist in this process are:

12. **Communicating.** The swift and accurate passage of factual information to parents, staff and pupils will prevent rumour and speculation fuelling the imagination and exacerbating already taut emotions. Staff should be clear about only one version of events to ensure unity, as they may later have the responsibility of discussing issues with pupils.

- **Confronting.** Pupils in particular should be allowed to confront the incident by discussing the truth and the facts. Those clearly traumatised by the effects of the incident and their parents will need to be advised about the availability of professional help and a list of contacts is at Annex D.

- **Supporting the Supporters.** The CIMT will be aware that, particularly as time passes, staff may become increasingly affected by the heightened emotions of a traumatic period. Consideration may be given to a short break away from School for those in need and the provision of cover where necessary.

- **Formal Recognition, Rituals and "Closure".** The CIMT will wish to consider the sending of sympathy notices by the School and by pupils, visiting the injured, and attending a funeral if invited. Consideration should also be given to the holding of special assemblies and memorial services, and the option of a more permanent memorial if appropriate. At a time judged to be suitable, one of the appropriate services could be used to signal the "closure" of the incident to allow school routine to be re-established. Staff and pupils will be aware of anniversaries, and the School may wish to consider an appropriate commemoration.

13. **Getting Back to Business.** The CIMT will judge a suitable time when School routines could be fully recommenced. The School may be ready to embark on this course once the incident has been psychologically "closed".

## **DISTRIBUTION OF DOCUMENT**

14. This document is to be distributed as follows:

- Staff Common Room
- Core Members of the CIMT
- School Nurse
- School Secretary
- Deputy Chair of Governors
- Head of Maintenance
- Health & Safety Officer