

Managing emergencies and traumatic incidents

Nine-step checklist

Step one - gather the facts:

- listen to what has happened
- record the caller's name and phone number
- record the names of others involved
- record and verify the facts of the event
- ascertain the reactions of those involved and record any actions taken
- check that the appropriate emergency services have been contacted
- inform the caller of any actions staff will take (such as informing the head teacher/principal, informing your local Ministry of Education, Special Education traumatic incident coordinator)
- give the caller a staff member's name and phone number in case they need to call back
- immediately after the call, contact the service manager/principal and/or the traumatic incident coordinator.

Step two - immediate actions for the service manager or principal:

- inform the management committee or board of trustees to determine the need to assemble the ECE service/school traumatic incident response team
- contact and establish the ECE service/school traumatic incident team to coordinate support
- set a meeting time and place to assemble
- contact the traumatic incident service for support
- provide the traumatic incident coordinator with a meeting time and place, where necessary
- inform any other ECE services/schools that may be affected
- establish a communication line with emergency services
- locate the master key, school floor plan, student lists and contacts, where relevant
- determine what, if any, information can be released.

Step three - immediate actions for the traumatic incident response team:

- convene an on-site traumatic incident team meeting
- share facts and assess the impact of the crisis (when did the event occur? where did the event occur? how did it happen? are members of the traumatic incident response team involved? do deputies need to be assigned roles?)
- assign traumatic incident response team roles
- determine how many children, young people and staff are likely to be affected and potential responses that might follow
- determine if the ECE service/school can remain open, eg are there enough staff? is the school a crime scene?

- determine if additional relief staff are needed
- determine if additional support services are needed
- arrange for identification badges for outside professionals
- assign phones for media, public, information and outside calls
- clear access to driveways to allow access for emergency response vehicles
- liaise with transport operators (passenger lists, route descriptions)
- identify and prepare support rooms for children and young people who are unable to be supported in classrooms
- identify a possible media room and times, prepare media statement
- identify parent access sites/rooms
- set up a central information board for staff access
- post relevant information on the central information board, ie information about phones, student support rooms, media times and places, parent access etc.

Step four - inform your community:

- determine how and when to release information to staff, ie, during a staff meeting
- determine how and when to notify all staff about the staff meeting time and remind staff of the traumatic incident response team role, ie to help the ECE service/school resume functioning
- decide how and when information can be released, ie in class groups (smaller), among staff
- develop sign in and out procedures for staff and visitors
- write statements for teachers to read to students
- determine communication and liaison with families/whānau
- write statements for the wider community.

Step five - respond to people who are injured:

- establish communication/liaison links with medical staff
- participate in and manage medical triage with other trained first aiders and medical staff
- ensure immediate medical intervention in life threatening situations
- ensure patients are prioritised for treatment in line with the severity of their medical condition
- keep accurate records of injured staff and students, doctors and hospitals involved
- communicate medical conditions and notify next of kin, release information in consultation with traumatic incident response team and police
- consult and inform staff
- minimise student exposure to the injury scene with the use of screens/removal etc
- manage parent arrivals and student release through agreed systems
- clean site (in culturally appropriate ways).

Step six - prepare for the media:

- designate a media spokesperson (usually the service manager or principal) and confirm that no one else talks
- ensure sufficient staff and phones are available to handle incoming media and public calls
- log all calls, where possible
- transfer calls to appropriate team members and staff, ie the identified media spokesperson

- ensure all administration staff and teachers are briefed on all aspects of information flow
- develop a media response in liaison with management/the board (keeping in mind confidentiality, family/whānau wishes, information available to be released and the need to check with police and emergency services)
- determine how and what information can be released to the community (eg, using recorded phone messages and staff statements)
- liaise with others to check whether the content of all messages is culturally appropriate
- maintain a media contact list
- control times and places of media arrival and remind media of the effect of media coverage on children and young people – especially where an incident involves suicide
- locate the mobile communication kit and check contents
- draft letters to be sent home, include facts, summaries, information about likely reactions and support networks.

Step seven - respond to the media:

- say to reporters that you will call them back, then take the time to prepare your single over-riding communications objective (eg, the one thing you want your audience to remember)
- ask the reporter for her name, organisation, contact details, general nature of her inquiry and who else she has spoken to
- talk only about your area of knowledge/expertise
- distinguish fact from opinion
- answer the questions firmly and directly
- keep to the issue and use key messages
- use plain language and avoid slang, jargon or waffle
- don't make personal comments
- don't criticise other people or organisations
- don't speculate
- don't say, 'no comment', instead, if you don't know the answer, say so
- don't look at or into the camera, instead talk to the interviewer, focusing at head level.

Step eight - support staff, students, parents and the community:

- prepare written material for the ECE service/school community to support their understanding of the event and communication with children and young people
- have teachers share prepared factual material with children and young people
- allow students to express thoughts and feelings regarding an incident
- clarify misinformation
- encourage teachers to normalise students' feelings and provide factual answers to questions
- encourage helping relationships, characterised by empathy, warmth and genuineness in the classroom
- take care not to lecture and to allow periods of silence for students
- avoid clichés such as 'be strong' and 'you are doing so well', understanding they reinforce a student's sense of aloneness
- be aware of cultural differences that exist in expressions of grief
- maintain confidentiality, where appropriate

- provide snacks, drinks to students and staff and support to staff, as appropriate
- visit selected classrooms to provide opportunities for discussion and support
- identify high-risk children and young people and monitor classroom and school attendance closely
- monitor staff attendance closely
- support referrals for immediate outside support, where needed
- provide contact numbers for parents to ring after hours
- document actions taken
- consider setting up an open forum for people to express concerns about the well-being of children and young people
- provide teachers, families/whānau and the community with information on supporting children and young people and where and how to seek additional support.

Step nine - evaluate your plan, procedures and practice:

- meet to evaluate your plan, procedures and practice within two to three weeks of a traumatic incident
- look at ways to improve the plan and procedures, eg, by upskilling staff
- identify and follow up outstanding tasks and identify and address any concerns
- identify any ongoing support needs of staff and students
- discuss the need for letters of appreciation (for people who helped) and/or any remembrance activities.