



Education and Training

International Education Unit

Critical Incident Management Guidelines

February 2009

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Critical Incident Management Guidelines

1. Critical Incidents

1.1 A critical incident may be described as any event that causes normally stable and healthy people to experience strong emotional or psychological distress, or threatens the safety of students and staff. It is an event that taxes people's coping ability and has the potential to interfere with their ability to cope at the time or later.

1.2 A critical incident is often sudden, unexpected and may take many forms, including but not limited to: injury, illness or death of a student, staff or other school community member; accident; injury; fatality; suicide; disappearance; bomb threat; act of violence; sexual assault; hold-up or attempted robbery; damage to property; natural disaster; fire or hazardous material incident (gas, chemical, fuel); threat of infectious disease; major theft; student arrest.

1.3 It is very common and normal for people to experience a range of reactions to critical incidents. They need reassurance that these things are a normal part of dealing with shock, loss and grief. The signs and symptoms can be cognitive, physical, behavioural or emotional in nature.

1.4 It is important that the potential for such incidents to affect individuals and the school community is recognised, understood and managed. Critical incidents require immediate and planned responses.

1.5 When working with international students, religious, political and cultural issues may require specific cross cultural communication and sensitivity. Immigration matters may have legal implications. It is important that advice from appropriate agencies relating to the international students is received.

2. Rationale

2.1 The aim of critical incident management guidelines, incorporating disaster/emergency plans, is to provide a framework within which the International Education Unit can best operate during and immediately after a critical incident. There are a number of vital phases in dealing with critical incidents – preparation and planning, response, recovery, diffusing and debriefing.

2.2 These Critical Incident Management Guidelines should be read in conjunction with related policy documents including the ACT DET [Critical Incidents factsheet](#). It provides the basis for the formulation of detailed strategies for responding to critical incidents in a manner that will:

- Deal effectively with the immediate and longer term health, welfare and safety of persons involved in, or affected by, a critical incident with sensitivity to cross cultural issues that may arise.
- Provide for the effective management of the schools' daily business in the immediate, short and longer term.
- Promote effective and appropriate communication to all persons affected.
- Promote collaborative working relationships within the school and with community agencies as necessary.
- Complement the schools' existing policies and procedures with respect to first aid, emergency evacuation and OH&S.

2.3 Procedures and guidelines will also be regularly reviewed and, where appropriate, updated and modified. What follows are the broad guidelines that form the basis for critical incident management in conjunction with relevant safety and emergency plans.

3. Standing Critical Incident Management (CIM) Team

3.1 The CIM Team is formed to effectively manage critical incidents. This team should communicate simply, take control and give clear and practical directions. The team should connect all stakeholders, reduce anxiety, restore calm and offer hope. It is important that the CIM team members have their own supportive and debriefing networks each day.

3.2 The Manager of the International Education Unit (IEU) and Assistant Manager of the IEU will be responsible for appointing the standing CIM team. To avoid phone congestion, clear lines of

communication are essential. Each member of the team will be issued with a list of members and their mobile contact numbers. This list will be revised annually or more frequently as required in the event of staff movements. See appendix.

3.3 There will be a standing CIM team with authority to co-opt other members of staff as required. The team must be sufficiently large to:

3.3.1 Allow for the fact that some incidents will occur outside normal school hours and that not all members will be contactable

3.3.2 Reflect the diversity of programmes delivered by the International Education Unit

3.4 The standing CIM team should therefore include representatives of all programmes while recognising that the composition of the team activated following any critical incident will vary according to the nature of the incident. For example, an incident involving a Year 11 student may require a different team to a student enrolled in the SIEC.

4. Initial Response Procedures

4.1 The most senior available staff member will assess the situation and consider any apparent risks to his/her own safety and the safety of others, as well as the impact the incident will have on the community, and the media coverage the incident may generate.

4.3 Where the most senior available staff member considers a critical incident to be apparent or likely, he/she must alert the Manager of the IEU, and/or a member of the Critical Incident Management Team. The Marketing and Media Unit should also be informed as soon as possible, in order to address any media issues that may arise. Communication is to be undertaken quickly and efficiently. Leaving a message on a mobile phone or answering machine, or emailing the relevant parties does NOT constitute making contact for these purposes.

4.4 Provided there is no threat to personal safety in doing so, the staff member will take steps to minimise further damage or injury. This may involve the support of willing bystanders.

4.5 The CIM team will then assume responsibility for re-assessing the incident and deal with matters of immediate urgency eg. establishing clear lines of communication with emergency services, media liaison, briefing switchboard staff, informing the school community.

4.6 As soon as practical, the CIM team will prepare a Critical Incident Initial Report outlining details re: the type of incident, the exact location and details of any person or persons who might be injured, in distress, or at risk.

4.7 The CIM team will review the situation, set priorities, allocate tasks/responsibilities and coordinate an immediate response including communications (to staff, students, families of those involved, helpers and the media).

Initial responses may include, but are not limited to:

- Contact with next of kin/significant others – what is the most appropriate manner of contact? How can support be offered?
- Arrangements for informing staff and students
- Guidelines to staff about what information to give students
- A written bulletin to staff if the matter is complex
- Briefing staff and delegating a staff member to deal with telephone/counter inquiries
- Managing media/publicity
- Identification of those students and staff members most clearly involved and therefore most at risk
- Liaison with other schools as appropriate
- Notification of and liaison with Sponsor/Agent if applicable
- Notification of and liaison with international student Embassy/Consulate

4.8 One team member should scribe for all meetings to keep records of meeting content and action plans/decisions made.

5. Follow Up Procedures

5.1 With assistance from others as required, the CIM team will provide ongoing support to persons affected and seek to restore school and workplace routines.

5.2 This process may include the following:

- Providing accurate and up to date information to the College/School community, homestay (where applicable), agents and families overseas.
- Providing ongoing support for students and staff members as required and continuing to monitor their needs
- Attending the funeral or memorial service if a death has occurred, in accordance with the family's wishes
- Attending to any administrative, legal or associated issues arising from the incident
- Arrangements for visits to/from family, including visas, accommodation, travel, crisis support and referral to appropriate services
- Liaison with police, doctors, hospital staff and other professionals
- Hiring independent interpreters
- Death notices
- Funeral/memorial service arrangements
- Refund of student's fees to pay repatriation or associated expenses
- Copy of death certificate
- Consideration of personal items and affairs (household and academic)
- Insurance matters, ambulance cover
- Formal stress management interventions required for students and/or staff (release from classes, leave, rescheduled assessments or exams)
- Liaison with teaching staff and principal
- Arrangements for further debriefing sessions for groups/individuals as required, including students and staff
- Liaison with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) if studies will be interrupted
- Fees issue to be resolved if student cannot continue with their studies
- Follow up condolence letters to family and thank you notes to all supporting emergency services and hospital staff, and other supporting professionals.
- Financial assistance for families of victim if residing in Australia
- Roster of students for hospital visits

5.3 A Critical Incident Report form, located on the Maze database, must be completed by IEU Manager within 24 hours after the incident.

5.4 The CIM team will organise a de-briefing to evaluate response procedures, make recommendations for handling future critical incidents and identify professional development and training needs which may need to be addressed as a result of the incident.

5.5 A written report, to be called a "follow up brief" will be compiled for every critical student incident.

5.5.1 The Manager of the IEU will be responsible for compiling incident reports

5.5.2 Critical incident reports will include the following information as a minimum:

- The date of the critical incident, the source and content of notification of the incident
- The student/s name/s and student ID number/s
- Any investigation undertaken
- Any action taken
- Who else was subsequently notified (eg. emergency services, parents, agents, embassy)
- Copy of Critical Incident Report form
- Notes from any meetings of the CIM team
- Copy of action plan formulated by CIM team
- Copy of any other documents generated in connection to the incident

6. Media Contact

6.1 In the event of a critical incident, the DET Media and Communications Unit in conjunction with the Manager of the IEU will determine who is the most appropriate media spokesperson. Prior permission for an interview is unlikely to be sought, so only the appointed person should communicate with the media.

6.2 Staff should be aware that media comment might have significant legal implications. In particular, staff should be wary of questions relating to how the incident occurred. Speculation on issues of negligence or blame can affect any inquiry claim following a critical incident.

6.3 Public comment made without authorisation may also be in breach of Section 9 of the ACT Public Sector Management Act.

6.4 In some critical incidents it may be appropriate to issue a media release after the event in order to avoid unnecessary media attention (eg. at student funeral). The DET Media and Communications Unit will provide help and advice on how to best handle media inquiries.

6.5 Media Contact in Schools

6.5.1 In the event of a critical incident, principals should refuse permission for the media to enter the grounds so that the focus can be on managing the incident and protect the safety and privacy of students.

6.5.2 If an interview is to occur, the approved spokesperson should follow the following guidelines:

- Comments should only be made after all parents whose children have been affected have been fully informed
- Responses should be restricted to facts that are clearly known to be true
- Not be drawn into making comment on government or Departmental policy
- Note any exemplary behaviour by students or staff
- Describe how the agency is dealing with the incident eg. counselling being provided
- Provide information such as all students are safe, where parents pick up their children or whether the school will be closed
- Principals should not allow the media to elicit detail of which they are unsure

6.6 Media Access to Children

6.6.1 The principal should protect students from unwanted interviews from the media. This may be difficult, particularly in secondary school where students make themselves available to the media. A school principal may consider counselling students on their responsibilities and rights in this matter.

6.6.2 Students, like any citizen, have the right to talk to the media if they so wish. They also have a responsibility to speak truthfully and not spread rumours or speculation about matters as they may not know all the facts.

6.6.3 As above, Principals should be aware that even if access to students or school premises is denied, the potential exists for the media to make contact with students as they leave school or before they enter the school property on the following day.

6.6.4 In the same way that teachers and principals must obtain the permission of students' parents or guardian before promotional photographs or videotapes can be used, media organisations should obtain permission to photograph or film students if they are likely to be clearly identified. One reason for this requirement is to protect the identity and location of certain students due to custody or other legal issues.

7. Critical Incident Management Guidelines Revision

7.1 These guidelines may be revised from time to time without notice. The current version is always available in electronic form from http://www.det.act.gov.au/school_education/international_students.

Appendix to IEU Critical Incident Management Policy

Critical Incident Management Team, 2009

Membership at January 2009			
Name	Title	Work phone	Mobile phone
Heather Paterson	Manager, IEU	6205 5293	0411 475 740
Nicole King	Assistant Manager, IEU	6205 6998	0428 357 200
Ann Bell	International Student Services, ANU	0414 432 831	0414 432 831
Bill Maiden	Principal, Lake Tuggeranong College	620 56219	0412 220 646
Billieann Bambrick	Senior Counsellor, ACT DET	6205 7623	0434 601 082
Eda Cevic	International Student Advisor, University of Canberra	6201 5021	0422 796 041
Jenny Watson	IPS Coordinator, Canberra College	6205 5785	0418 618 148
Lynne Latta	Senior Manager, International Services Unit, CIT	6207 4665	0419 288 075

The Critical Incident policy covers international students and staff members working and studying in ACT Government Schools. It is available in electronic format at http://www.det.act.gov.au/school_education/international_students. Members of the CIM Team MUST be familiar with this document.

The CIM Team may involve other people to offer assistance as necessary in any given situation eg. Emergency services personnel, hospital staff, DIAC.

CIM Team membership will be updated each January or as staff movements make it necessary to do so.

Emergency Numbers	
Fire, Police and Ambulance	000
Police Headquarters (24 hours)	131 444
Chubb Security	6280 4343
Lifeline (24 hours)	13 11 14
Crime Stoppers ACT	1800 333 000
Domestic Violence Crisis Service	6280 0900
Alcohol & Drug Information Service	6207 9977
The Canberra Hospital	6244 2222
Calvary Hospital	6201 6111