

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

Critical and traumatic incidents can occur at any time and may include the death of a student or teacher; violence or assault in the school; destruction or vandalism of part of the school; student or teacher taken hostage; travel accidents; natural disasters; death or injury on tours; civil disturbances and terrorism. Such incidents must be dealt with as effectively as possible, with the best interests of the students, their families and the school staff at heart. Because of the infrequency of such incidents, schools are far too often unprepared for such occurrences.

This document was commissioned by SAHISA to serve as a reference document for Heads of ISASA schools to assist them in dealing with disaster incidents within the school. After some debate, the authors agreed that it would be more useful as a brief "guideline-type" document rather than an exhaustive "instructor's manual" on the issue of managing a disaster within a school.

2. PREPARATION

- Head
- Deputies
- Counsellor
- First Aid Organiser
- OHS Representative

3. CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

3.1 Roles Played by Key Persona

3.1.1 Head

- Remain highly visible.
- Address the media regularly (use a planned statement wherever possible).
- Remain in contact with the school Governing Body.
- Visit all parents of injured or deceased students. (Get professional advice on how to break the news of a child's death to the parents from organisations like FAMSA or Hospice)
- Address the parent body through meetings and newsletters.
- Address and consult with staff immediately.
- Appoint a staff member to ensure that information regarding funeral services and so on is kept up to date.
- Provide access to counselling to staff and meet with staff at the end of each day.
- Communicate clearly: beware of sensation, rumour and speculation and ensure that all main role players are informed first.
- Recommend individual funeral services, rather than group services.

3.1.2 Counsellors

- Provide counselling for students who require it.
- Make available the access telephone numbers for outside resources such as 702 Crisis Clinic, Wits Crisis Clinic, The Family Life Centre.
- Consult with class teachers with regards to students at risk (e.g. those who have had a death in their family or whose parents are divorced) and organise separate counselling for them.
- Provide Information to parents.
- Seek additional secretarial support.

3.1.3 Staff

- Announce the event to students.
- Lead class discussions.
- Identify students in need of counselling.
- Generate activities to reduce the impact of the trauma (this may involve moving away from the normal syllabus and involve reading, acting, walking).
- Structure and shorten any assignments.
- Postpone and/or cancel testing.
- Prepare students for possible memorial services and give them time to ask questions.
- Allow students to attend funeral and/or memorial services.

3.2. Develop an Action Plan with Delegated Responsibilities. It is essential to develop a critical incident management plan clarifying specific role where possible.



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The following must be taken into account:

3.2.1. Short-term action

- Activate outside contacts and provide a suitable list. Specify times for briefing staff.
- Arrange debriefing meeting for directly affected staff.
- Check that procedures for monitoring staff and students are in place.
- Activate strategies for young people to express their feelings about the situation, if they wish.
- Contact families of those hurt or bereaved and express sympathy (in person for those bereaved, otherwise telephonically and in writing).

3.2.2. Medium-term action

- Ensure that a member of staff makes contact with students at home or in hospital.
- Make sensitive arrangements for their return to school.
- Arrange alternative teaching staff, if necessary.
- Arrange support for affected staff.
- Arrange consultation so that staff can better support students.
- Ensure clear understanding of confidentiality in consultation.
- Clarify procedures for referring students for individual help.
- Liaise with parents.
- Decide about the attendance of funerals/memorial services.
- Share the planning of a special assembly or memorial service.
- Check that monitoring procedures are in place and followed.

3.2.3. Long-term planning

- Introduce strategies to continue monitoring vulnerable students and staff.
- Consult and decide on whether and how to mark anniversaries.
- Ensure that new staff members are aware of affected students and how to obtain further help.

3.2.4. Remember to take the following into account

- Plan the school curriculum to account for the normal rites of passage in dealing with grief.
- Don't forget the staff in dealing with their emotions and sensitivities.
- Be aware of multi-cultural and multi-faith issues.
- Develop strategies for increasing social support between staff, pupils and parents.
- Remember that blame, inevitably, gets attributed.
- Remember that the legal process, enquiries and even news stories may bring back distressing memories and cause temporary upset. Note that the central factor in the success of any Critical Incident Management Plan is effective administration. Within the school community, this demands comprehensive class lists where the contact details of parents/guardians are updated regularly (minimum once a year). The databases should be compiled with various purposes in mind such as extracting the details of siblings in the school, extracting cellular telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of parents/guardians, highlighting medical aid membership and so on.

4.COMMUNICATIONS

Efficient and effective communication between the various parties involved in any incident is critical to managing the situation. This demands rapid identification of the diverse 'audiences' (such as parents, teachers, the student body and the media, both print and electronic) and addressing their specific information needs.

4.1. Establish a Crisis Call Centre

- A central point for managing all telephonic communications is essential.
- Draw up a roster of personnel (staff, Board members) to man the call centre as soon as possible after news of the incident has broken.
- Prepare scripts to ensure consistency of the messages disseminated.
- Maintain a register of the calls made and received.

4.2. Establish a Press Office with Delegated Spokespeople

- Managing the media is critical to ensuring accuracy of reporting, school visibility and consistency of the information published/broadcast.
- Establish a press office with responsibility for compiling and disseminating press statements (and updates thereto) to the media and collating media reports.
- Assign this office (or another) responsibility for writing the telephone scripts, bulk e-mail contents and news updates for the school community.
- Assign personnel with responsibility for responding to specific target audiences (media, parents, etc.)

4.3. Brief personnel who are impacted

- As soon as practicable, teachers and administrative staff must be briefed on the incident, the status of any injured teachers or students, the school's incident management plan and their responsibilities in the latter's implementation.
- As soon as possible, ideally the following school day, call all students, and staff to an assembly, where a full briefing of the incident should be conducted, including assurances regarding the school's incident management plan. The assembly should also advise those present that counselling services will be made available.

4.4. Communications media

- Media statements – Excellent for briefing the media, stating the school's official position regarding the incident, and expressing sentiments publicly.
- E-mail – Excellent for disseminating media statements; circulating media statements to parents, teachers and members of the Governing Body; and keeping Board of Directors members informed of progress.
- SMS – Excellent for announcing meetings; reminding people of their responsibilities; and quick status updates (such as the condition of injured individuals).
- Telephones – Important for one-on-one communications with parents, teachers, and staff (though laborious); and as a two-way conduit of information (such as entertaining and answering questions).
- School newsletters – Excellent for long-term endurance of reports on the incident, the school's response, progress of the incident management plan and so on. Electronic versions of newsletters provide a quicker mechanism for dissemination than the traditional



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printed route.

- Worldwide web – Upload media statements and newsletters to the school's website, to ensure that its content remains up to date.

5.FURTHER LESSIONS LEARNED

- Effective intervention prevents further morbidity
- Inappropriate intervention can exacerbate post-traumatic stress disorder
- Educators and parents want and need a greater sense of control
- Need for educators to be trained in the effects of primary and secondary traumatic stress
- Need for educator support - personal and professional
- Team members are vulnerable and need support themselves
- Never anticipate what children can and cannot cope with.
- Balance an awareness of the pupils' trauma and their need to move on.
- Anticipate stressful situations for the pupils in the future.

Appendix 1

DEALING WITH EMOTIONAL TRAUMA

When a traumatic accident happens, it has profound effects on the individual - whether a child, an adolescent, or an adult. These effects ripple through the community, involving the individual's family, friends and associates (such as teachers, fellow classmates or, in the case of adults, their work colleagues).

The belief that children soon forget and put traumatic incidents behind them is exactly that – a mythical belief! All children, of all ages, are susceptible to the negative effects of trauma, which may manifest in different ways depending on the developmental stage of the individual concerned. Therefore, each child must be handled appropriately for his/her developmental stage and with due consideration for his/her physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

What people need after they have experienced a crisis

- Physical safety
- Support - physical, social and emotional
- Re-establishment of a sense of self and self-worthiness
- Sense of autonomy - regaining control
- Connections with others - (re)establishing trust
- Sense of purpose - which comes about in community
- To be given appropriate, truthful information when necessary
- To get back to daily routine as soon as possible
- Exercise and relaxation
- Avoidance of major decisions for the time being



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Traumatised individuals – Signs to look out for

- Sudden change in the child's behaviour or personality – either disruptive or withdrawn
- Post-traumatic stress symptoms (as above)
- School performance deteriorates
- Child discloses other traumatic experiences in written assignments or class discussions
- Change in sleep/eating patterns

The Difference between Recovery and Resilience

Recovery is the pathway which is followed after a traumatic experience. Starting off as temporary dysfunction and then gradually over a period of time returning to functionality

Resilience reflects the ability a person must maintain a more stable equilibrium

Recovery is based on empowerment of the survivor and creating new connections. (Herman 1992:133)

One of the most important factors which promotes recovery is social support strengthening interpersonal connections through caring and hopeful expectations. Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary normative human resources: in the minds, brains and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

- Remain calm and reassuring. Children take their cues from you, especially young children. Acknowledge the loss or destruction but emphasise the community's efforts to clean up and rebuild. To the extent it is possible to do so, assure them that family and friends will take care of them and that life will return to normal.
- Acknowledge and normalise their feelings. Allow children to discuss their feelings and concerns, and address any questions they may have regarding the event. Listen and empathise. An empathetic listener is very important. Let them know that their reactions are normal and expected.
- Encourage children to talk about disaster- related events. Children need an opportunity to discuss their experiences in a safe, accepting environment. Provide activities that enable children to discuss their experiences. This may include a range of methods (both verbal and nonverbal) and incorporate varying projects e.g., drawing, stories, music, drama, audio and video recording). Seek the help of the school psychologist, counsellor, or social worker for ideas in managing the conversation.

- Promote positive coping and problem-solving skills. Activities should teach children how to apply problem-solving skills to disaster-related stressors. Encourage children to develop realistic and positive methods of coping that increase their ability to manage their anxiety and to identify which strategies fit with each situation.
- Emphasize children's resiliency. Focus on their competencies. Help children identify what they have done in the past that helped them cope when they were frightened or upset. Bring their attention to other communities that have experienced natural disasters and recovered.
- Strengthen children's friendship and peer support. Children with strong emotional support from others are better able to cope with adversity. Children's relationships with peers can provide suggestions for how to cope and can help decrease isolation. In many disaster situations, friendships may be disrupted because of family relocations. In some cases, parents may be less available to provide support to their children because of their own distress and feelings of being overwhelmed. Activities such as asking children to work cooperatively in small groups can help children strengthen supportive relationships with their peers.
- Take care of your own needs. Take time for yourself and try to deal with your own reactions to the situation as fully as possible. You will be better able to help your children if you are coping well. If you are anxious or upset, your children are more likely to feel the same way. Talk to other adults such as family, friends, faith leaders, or counsellors. It is important not to dwell on your fears or anxiety by yourself. Sharing feelings with others often makes people feel more connected and secure. Take care of your physical health. Make time, however small, to do things you enjoy. Avoid using drugs or alcohol to feel better.

GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS

- Identify children and youth who are high risk and plan interventions. Risk factors are outlined in the above section on children's reactions. Interventions may include classroom discussions, individual counselling, small group counselling, or family therapy. From classroom discussions, and by maintaining close contact with teachers and parents, the school crisis response team can help determine which students need counselling services. A mechanism also needs to be in place for self-referral and parent-referral of students.
- Provide time for students to discuss the disaster. Depending on the situation, teachers may be able to guide this discussion in class, or students can meet with the school psychologist or other mental health professional for a group crisis intervention. Classroom discussions help children to make some sense of the disaster. They also encourage students to develop effective means of coping, discover that their classmates share similar questions, and develop peer support networks. Teachers should not be expected to conduct such discussions if children are severely impacted or if they themselves are distressed.

- Allow time for staff to discuss their feelings and share their experiences. Members of your crisis team should also have the opportunity to receive support from a trained mental health professional. Providing crisis intervention is emotionally draining and caregivers will need an opportunity to process their crisis response. This could include teachers and other school staff if they have been serving as crisis caregivers for students.
- Secure additional mental health support. Although many caregivers are often willing to provide support during the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, long-term services may be lacking. School mental health professionals can help provide and coordinate mental health services, but it is important to connect with community resources as well in order to provide such long-term assistance. Ideally these relationships would be established in advance.

Appendix 2

BUS SAFETY IN SOUTH AFRICA

BUS SAFETY [Courtesy ArriveAlive]

South Africa has a national bus fleet of approximately 27 440 buses, of which more than 15 000 are involved in formal public transport activities (for reward). The other buses are found in commerce and industry and government institutions where they are used mostly for in-house purposes. These buses travel approximately 1 062 million km each year and undertake approximately 720 million passenger trips a year.

The bus industry plays a vital role in the economic development of South Africa. As a provider of services, it continues to provide mobility to millions of people who are dependent on public transport to get to and from work, school, go shopping, and seek employment. Statistics indicate that 80% of South Africa's population is totally dependent on public transport for its mobility needs. Most bus operators are affiliated to the South African Bus Operators Association ("SABOA"), which provides centralised services that include measures to implement specific safety strategies. While the incidence of bus accidents and the number of fatalities and/or casualties associated with them remains unacceptably high, statistical evidence indicates that the numbers have declined.

The National Department of Transport has acknowledged the need for a policy that regulates certain operational safety issues for all bus, taxi and freight operators, so as to ensure that passengers and freight are moved in a safe, reliable and cost effective manner. To address these operational safety issues, the department has undertaken to develop and implement a vehicle quality management system for bus operators.

In support of this initiative, SABOA has developed a code – known as SANS 10399:2003 (South African National Standard – Quality Management Systems: Requirements for Bus Operators). The objectives of the code are to provide a basic minimum quality standard that will promote the movement of passengers in a safe, efficient and reliable manner. As such,



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it will provide a platform on which transport operators can base their quality policies, so as to ensure that the quality systems are currently being managed by them meet the highest standards.

SANS 10399:2003 includes standard safety inspection sheets for daily and scheduled inspection purposes(see END OF Appendix 2). For additional information, visit www.arrivealive.co.za or www.saboa.co.za

TRANSPORTING STUDENTS SAFELY [Courtesy Redhill School, Johannesburg]

Most schools engage in transporting their students, whether as part of the sports programme, or for excursions and tours. School-owned vehicles are supplemented with contracted bus services, as necessary. In every instance, the safety of students and school staff is paramount and must never be compromised. The following is based on a broad outline of the approach taken by Redhill School, Johannesburg, regarding the transportation of its teachers, staff and students.

General

Any organisation planning to transport people must take the following factors into consideration:

- Passenger safety.
- The competence and training of the driver, and whether the driver holds an appropriate and valid licence.
Ask for a record of training, refresher training, trips completed and so on.
- The hire company must be a reputable and licensed company.
- The condition of the vehicle: when last it was serviced (ask for the service record, which must include the official stamp of the servicing agent); the validity of the licence disk; the condition of the tyres, windscreen, windscreen wipers and so on. If in doubt telephone the company.
- Depending on the duration of the journey, does the driver have sufficient capacity, concentration and experience to complete the journey, or is a second driver required?
- Is it a local versus long-distance journey? What breaks will be scheduled?
- Review typical traffic conditions and weather conditions.
- Are appropriate contingencies and breakdown or emergency arrangements in place? Is there a separate vehicle accompanying the bus?
- Is public liability cover in place? Would it be sufficient to cover a potential claim? (Note that both the school and the hire company must have public liability cover).
- Who is responsible for passenger (student) supervision? Are there sufficient experienced teachers onboard the bus? What is the luggage/trailer requirements?



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- Are seatbelts fitted? Who checks they are fastened while the bus is moving?
- Does the bus have first-aid/fire extinguishers on board?
- Should passengers (teachers and students) be exposed to a safety drill (as on aircraft) prior to commencement of journey?
- Has provision been made for the safety of students at pick-up and drop-off zones, including roll calls at any stage the pupils may have been allowed to disembark.
- Students must be banned from driving area at all times.
- For disabled students, are the vehicles suitably equipped to handle same?

Regular external transporters

Redhill School has researched the reputable companies used regularly. One company has not installed seatbelts, not simply because they are awaiting legislation to do so, but their present fleet is not designed for the installation of seatbelts. Installing seatbelts necessitates reinforcement of the bus floor structure, and probably pillars too. It is not a case of simply installing belts attached to convenient points. It is also fairly well-known that, as things happened in the Grayson Preparatory School accident, seatbelts could have led to greater injury and loss of life – but of course, each accident will have its own peculiar dynamics. In addition, it is one thing having the belts available; it's another ensuring that the children are wearing them throughout the journey.

The same company does not install steel anti blow-out bands in their tyres. However, their policy is to replace all their tyres well before tread reaches the legal tread-depth limits (more than 12 000 km early).

Their buses are fully serviced every 10 000 km to 15 000 km, in line with the various manufacturers' specifications. In addition, every coach undergoes a mandatory weekly check, with particular emphasis on the safety aspects (brakes, tyres, shocks, steering, and so on). Services are meticulously recorded, and these records are available to the public should they wish to see them.

Drivers are monitored and undergo a mandatory annual refresher course. Again, records are kept of this programme. Drivers have mandatory rest-times, depending on the duration of the journey. The buses also carry tracking devices.

The reality is, Redhill School believes (as do quite a few other schools) that this company is the best and safest available. Although schools could rely on parents for transport, this option is fraught with legal complexities – and of course there is no guarantee that parents' vehicles are any safer than the coaches.

School-owned Vehicles

- Where kombi's (maximum 16 seaters) are used, the driver must have a valid PDP.

- Appropriate training of kombi drivers is highly recommended e.g. the advanced driver's course/first aid and so on. Any suspected health problems (or taking of medication that might affect judgement) associated with the driver should be referred immediately to the school's executive. Regular medical checks are advised.
- The school's vehicles should be checked on a regular basis. Proper servicing at a recognised and reputable garage (preferably where the vehicle was originally purchased) is vital. All records and service histories must be kept.
- All school vehicles are logged in and out. The driver is equipped with a cellular telephone.
- The tyres of school vehicles should be fitted with safety bands, which provide control and steer ability to drivers in the event of a blowout. Private Vehicles Teachers and parents must assume responsibility for safety of students. In the UK, it is recommended that volunteer drivers are carefully vetted by the school!
- Parents need to be informed of their legal responsibilities.
- Consent forms need to be sought from the parents of students being transported by other parents.
- It is advisable that parents placed in charge of pupils are not put in a position where they are alone with a student.

Responsibilities of Parents and Students

One recurring complicating factor is the tremendous amount of chasing up tour reply slips and indemnity forms after clear deadlines. There is a cut-off time when a booking has to be confirmed, so that costs are established. Yet last-minute bookings and even on-the-morning requests are frequently received. There are also students whose parents transport them to a camp, and then rely on the bus to bring the student home.

Hiring an extra mini-bus at the last minute to avoid any overloading could push up the cost of a tour by a considerable additional sum – with no notice. Teachers “on the ground” have to make the call whether or not additional students should be accommodated on a tour/excursion and thus whether or not further transport should be hired.

Basic Bus Safety Checklist

Use the following as a guideline when considering using a bus service provider. Please note that it is not an exhaustive safety checklist:

1. Only employ a reputable bus company
 2. Request buses that are fitted with 'anti-flat' tyres
 3. Conduct a basic roadworthiness check:
- Condition of tyres and alignment (visual inspection only)
 - Validity of licence disk (it must be current)



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- All lights fully functional (headlamps, brake lights, indicators)
- Condition of windscreen wipers (Or obtain an independent road worthiness check, either through the local metro police or the Automobile Association)
- 4. Establish the competence of the driver:
 - Licence
 - Attendance at period training courses
 - Experience
- 5. Ensure that buses are not overloaded
- 6. Ensure that students are always accompanied by responsible adults (such as teachers)
- 7. Consider sending an independent car along, following the bus as a back-up system

Appendix 3:

SANS 10399:2003: BUS SAFETY INSPECTION SHEETS

This Inspection Sheet is included for the reader's interest. Schools should request compliance of the SANS requirements by bus companies, but should not endeavour to conduct this check themselves – it is the responsibility of the bus company to conduct the test and to indicate that it has been done.

(A) DRIVER'S DAILY/SHIFT SAFETY INSPECTION SHEET

A.1 Compulsory minimum checks

Bus No.: _____

Make and model: _____

Date: _____

Driver: _____

Check braking system

Condition and operation of brakes
Bus/trailer connections
Pressure and air leaks

Check lighting

Cleanliness and operation of:
Headlamps – main beam and dipped beam
Stop lamps
Rear lamps



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Front position lamps

Number plate lamps

Indicator lamps

Check windscreen wipers

Operation

Condition of blades

Check reflectors and retro-reflection

Cleanliness and fitment of:

Side amber reflectors

Rear red reflectors

White reflectors at front of trailer

Side and rear retro-reflective strip marking (if required)

Chevron warning panel

Warning triangle

Number plates

Check tyres and rims

Tyre pressure

Tread depth

Bulge or lump or cuts

Other visible damage

Wheel nuts

Torque

Fitment of all nuts

Condition of rims

Check steering mechanism

Excessive steering play (not greater than 45°)

Check speedometer

Check wheel flaps (trailers only, as applicable)



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A.2 Other checks

Cleanliness of motor vehicle:

Inside

Outside

Broken and missing windows

Exhaust system:

Excessive smoke and leaks

Water, oil and fuel levels

Petrol/diesel cap

Operation of on-board computer system

(B) RECOMMENDED SCHEDULED INSPECTION

B.1 Engine

Check for oil leaks

Check oil level

Check radiator cap

Pressure test cooling system

Check all radiator hoses and clamps

Check accelerator pedal linkages

Check fuel system for leaks

Check fuel lines

Check fuel tank cap and filter neck

Check fuel filters for leaks

Test engine protection device

Check and secure all visible bolts and nuts

B.2 Front axle/steering

Check steering system for leaks

Check oil level

Check draglinks

Check track rod and ball joints

Check idler arm bushes

Check drop arm

Check front hub oil level

Check and secure all visible bolts and nuts

Check steering arm



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B.3 Brakes

- Check front brake operation
- Check rear brake operation
- Check hand brake operation
- Check auxiliary systems
- Adjust brakes when necessary
- Check brake linings

B.4 Gearbox

- Check for oil leaks
- Check gearbox oil level
- Check mountings

B.5 Drive line

- Check slip joints
- Check universal joints
- Check and secure all visible bolts and nuts

B.6 Rear axle

- Check oil level
- Check brake linings
- Check and secure all visible bolts and nuts

B.7 Suspension

- Check all road springs
- Check all spring fox clamps
- Check all spring hangers
- Check all spring brackets and bolts
- Check all shackle pins and bushes
- Check shock absorbers
- Torque U-bolts rear
- Torque U-bolts front
- Check stabilizer bars, arms and bushes
- Check and secure all visible bolts and nuts