



Critical Incident and Tragedy

Little Acorns School

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1. Introduction

What is a Critical Incident or Tragedy?

Traumatic incidents affecting schools and local communities seem to be on the increase.

1a Such incidents come in many forms from major disasters such as Lockerbie, Hungerford, Herald of Free Enterprise, and Dunblane, to smaller scale incidents involving the death or serious injury of students, staff or parents/carers, such as AnnMaguire, the teacher in Leeds. Whatever the scale of the incident, the effect on the individuals involved can be equally devastating.

1b It is now recognised that children are no more resilient than adults to traumatic events and their reactions are basically the same. The school, therefore, has an important role to play in helping children to understand and

cope with the impact of such events. School is a normal place for a child to be and offers security at a time of insecurity. Teachers have many skills and techniques which they use routinely to help troubled children, and, with some further training and confidence building, these skills can be adapted to help children cope with a range of traumatic incidents.

Accidents or disasters affecting students and staff are regrettably all too common. For example, if a student dies, the whole school may feel the loss; or, when students who have suffered shock or injury return to school, they may need to be treated with particular sensitivity. There are any number of possibilities requiring any number of responses. We should be prepared for any such situation, to minimise possible trauma to students, staff and parents.

2. Critical Incident or Tragedy

Critical Incident or Tragedy may be defined as a single incident or sequence of incidents which

- are sudden and unexpected
 - contain real or imagined threats to a person
- overwhelm usual coping mechanisms
- cause severe disruption
 - are traumatic to anyone

Critical Incidents affecting Little Acorns School may include:

- The death of a student(s) or member(s) of staff through sudden accident, murder, terminal illness or suicide.
- A serious accident involving students and School personnel on or off School premises.
- A violent attack or violent intrusion onto School premises, e.g., involving an armed intruder or a bomb alert.
- Fire, flood, building collapse or major vandalism in the school.
- A hostage situation.
- A disaster in the community, e.g., transport accident, terrorism.

The TRAUMA caused by critical incidents challenges individuals mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually

REACTIONS TO MAJOR STRESS IN ADULTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

It is likely that a number of people may suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of a tragedy (PTSD). This syndrome is defined by the World Health Organisation as a reaction that may follow an event that is outside the range of usual human experience and would be very distressing to almost anyone.

There are three main groups of symptoms or reactions:

1. The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks where the individual thinks it is all happening again.
2. There is persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, or there is numbing of general responsiveness.
3. There are signs of increased physiological arousal such as disturbed sleep and poor concentration.

PTSD is now recognised as a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. Staff and students alike can be affected both emotionally and in their work achievements by crises, and these effects can sometimes last for many years. It is clear that the school should be aware of the possibility of these reactions and other fears. We must ensure that victims receive sensitive understanding/treatment, in addition to counselling from either within or outside school. We need to plan ahead to minimise the impact of such crises.

3. Development of our Critical Incident Contingency Plan

Although it is not possible to predict when and where a disaster will strike, there is much that Little Acorns School can do to be prepared should the "worst" happen. This policy is to enable the Head Teacher to put in place the following contingencies within the policy so that in the event of a disaster, on whatever scale, staff can act quickly to cope with the distress and confusion and begin to regain a sense of control.

The experience of schools which have been involved in a critical incident shows that those which have made some preliminary plans are able to act promptly and cope most effectively with the traumatic consequences of a critical incident. These plans would include suggested actions, roles and responsibilities which can be initiated promptly in the event of a critical incident.

Foremost in this planning is the creation of a Critical Incident Leadership Team, based on the Senior Leadership Team but also including staff who are most suited in terms of their personal and practical skills and their availability

and reliability. This team should aim to meet annually to review and update the Critical Incident Contingency Plan. The Team will have at least one member whose role it is to coordinate and liaise with the media – this is the Responsible Individual (SBayliss). This needs to be someone other than the principal as she may well be deployed elsewhere.

Little Acorns School's Critical Incident Contingency Plan will have prepared procedures and responses that can be put into action in the immediate aftermath of a critical incident. It will need to be flexible enough to cope with a wide range of possible incidents which may occur either on or off site.

4. Aims Advice and Support for the School

The Education Authority has a critical incident response team who can be contacted to provide support to schools.

Critical Incident Line: Kent police on; Emergency 999 ; Non-emergency 101 ; Anti-terrorist hotline 0800 789 321 ; Calling from abroad +44 1622 690 690 ; By phone 0800 555 111.

This number should be used by all schools to report a critical incident that has occurred both during the day and out of hours. The previous numbers are no longer in use.

Little Acorns has a therapeutic team of professionals in house. The school counsellor and Occupational/Equine Therapist will provide staff and students with appropriate support.

This includes:

- Prompt telephone contact with the Critical Incident Leadership team to discuss the nature and scale of the incident.
- Advise and support for staff and a plan for further action as appropriate.
- Support for staff and students who are particularly affected. There is often not time to contact the parents/carers of all children who request this type of support.
- Little Acorns School prepares, as part of their contingency planning, a proforma letter to parents/carers about the involvement of the Psychological Service in supporting the school following a Critical Incident. See Appendix 1

Advice can be given about individuals who may require longer term therapeutic help.

4a Education Social Workers are familiar faces in schools and can offer listening time and advice to students and staff.

In the event of a major incident or disaster the emergency services (police, fire, ambulance) will take the Lead role and the Social Services Department have a statutory duty to manage and coordinate the situation in line with County Council's Emergency Planning Procedures.

5. Critical Incident/Tragedy Plan

LOCKDOWN PROCEDURES

Lockdown procedures should be seen as a sensible and proportionate response to any external incident which has the potential to pose a threat to the safety of children and adults in the setting. Lockdown procedures may be activated in response to any number of situations, but some of the more typical might be:

- The close proximity of a dangerous animal
- A reported incident or disturbance in the local community (with the potential to pose a risk to children and adults in the setting)
- A warning being received regarding an environmental risk locally, of air pollution (smoke plume, gas cloud etc)
- A major fire in the vicinity of the setting
- An intruder onsite (with the potential to pose a risk to children and adults in the setting)

Information regarding the perceived threat could come from a variety of sources:

- Communication from an outside source via reception
- Staff or students spotting an intruder/animal on site

Such information should be reported immediately to A Neal or J Curley.

A full lockdown signifies an immediate threat to the setting. Any member of the Teaching team has the authority to put the school into Lockdown.

It is difficult to plan for every eventuality; these procedures may have to be adapted.

Immediate action:

·A lockdown alert will be transmitted via the walkie-talkies in each classroom with the word 'lock down'. An email will be sent to all staff simply saying 'lockdown'. All to remain in lockdown until the all-clear given over the walkie-talkies and email.

·An evacuate alert will be transmitted via the walkie-talkies in each classroom with the word 'Evacuate to location'. An email will be sent to all staff simply saying 'evacuate to x'. All Students and staff should make their way to the Car Park and/or London Beach Golf Club depending on location specified and remain there until the all-clear is given.

·The Emergency Services will be contacted on the instructions of The Head Teacher.

Checklist:

Lockdown:

- All students and staff should quickly move away from the threat and return to/stay in the building.
- Students and staff in the outside area should make their way to the closest classroom.
- External doors should be locked by fire marshal staff or the Head Teacher if possible.
- Internal doors may be locked (where a member of staff with a key is present)
- Move furniture behind the classroom door if it is not locked
- Shut and lock windows, draw blinds and curtains, (so an intruder cannot see in), move students away from internal doors and windows. Pull the door blind down.
- Turn off lights and computer monitors

- All mobile phones should be put on silent immediately
- The end of lockdown will be signalled by an announcement on the walkie-talkie “All clear”, followed by a short email confirmation - there will be limited communication during lockdown

Evacuate:

- All children to be escorted to the carpark or London Beach Golf Club with adults.
- A Neal to stay on site, in safe location to liaise with emergency services. J Curley in A Neal absence.
- All children to be moved quickly, if a child refuses, stage 1 to be used to evacuate the child safely and quickly.
- Evacuate out of the office door. Use the key in the lock box to unlock the door.
- Teachers to do a head count to ensure all their class children are present when arrived at specified evacuation point.
- Carpark* - To keep the children calm, together and in safe location in the car park, until all-clear is given.
- Use Walkie-talkie as primary communication between evacuated group and school.
- London Beach Golf Club* – D Bromnick to collect the ‘grab bag’. One teacher to let the reception know that there is a threat at school and to show them to a safe and secure location. To keep the children calm, together and in safe location, until all-clear is given.
- Use work WhatsApp as primary communication between evacuated group and school.
- The end of evacuation will be signalled by an announcement on WhatsApp “All clear”, followed by a short email confirmation.

Students will not be released to taxis/parents/carers during this time the lockdown or evacuation is in place.

We ask that Parent/Carers:

- Do not contact the setting during lockdown as this could block telephone lines that are needed for contacting emergency services

- Do not come to the setting during lockdown as this may place themselves and others in danger
- Wait for the school to contact them about when it is safe for them to come and collect their child

After lockdown has taken place:

- A message to parents/carers will be sent home as soon as possible following any serious incident to inform parents/carers of the context of lockdown.
- Following the need for lockdown, the Head Teacher will create a full record of the event. Policies and procedures will be reviewed as soon as possible to identify any areas for potential development.
- ***Staff and students will practise this annually where possible.***

School Trips offsite:

- The school office will keep an accurate list of all staff and students involved
- The teacher in charge should also have a copy of this list
- The office and Teacher in charge on the trip will keep list of contact telephone numbers
- The teacher in charge should have up-to-date medical information about students (re allergies, epilepsy, etc).

The Head Teacher...

A vital first task is to obtain accurate information about the incident. Rumours spread quickly and can add to the distress of those involved. Find out: -

What has happened

- Where and When
- Extent of injuries, numbers and names
- Location of injured and

Inform Staff

- Ensure all staff are informed promptly of the incident - it may be necessary to convene a short staff meeting.
- Establish procedures for keeping staff up to date with incoming information.
- Agree how and when students will be informed.

- Be sensitive to the feelings of staff, particularly those who are closest to the students and adults involved in the incident and to those who have had recent personal traumas.

Barbara Dansey, Chair of the Advisory Board, should be informed as soon as possible after the incident.

Informing parents/carers of children directly involved

Parents/carers of children directly involved should be contacted quickly and with sensitivity. Consistency and reliability of information is essential. The school may need to set a room aside for meetings with parents/carers.

In the event of an incident involving death or serious injury, particularly off site, the police will often make the first contact with families.

If using the telephone:

- Fully brief the member of staff making the contact, recognising that this can be a very stressful task. A script must be provided by the Head Teacher
- Take careful note of those parent/carers who have been contacted and those who still need to be informed so that duplicate messages are not given. Consider removal of affected parties from distribution lists as they may receive upsetting info etc.
- Where appropriate, offer help with transport arrangements.
- Check that the parent/carers are not on their own. Make suggestions for contacting relatives or neighbours as appropriate.
- Inform parent/carers of the telephone number in the school that has been dedicated to receiving enquiries.
- Inform parent/carers how to obtain more information and when they can expect this to be available.
- Wherever possible, parent/carers of all other children in the school should be informed that the school has experienced an incident and that their child may be upset. We will communicate with parents/carers via email or phone calls. Include:
 - brief details of the incident without names.
 - an explanation about the involvement of the Educational Psychologist, Educational Psychotherapists or other services supporting staff and students at the school
 - how parents/carers can get more information. (See Appendix 1 for example letter).

Informing students

- The Head will prepare proforma letter to parents/carers - to give some brief facts and information about the incident and availability of support, etc. (see Appendix 1).
- Handouts for staff/students/parents/carers about "normal" reactions to trauma/shock will also be sourced, be collated in advance. Everyone will know where to find these.
- Some staff may find it difficult to be involved in the dissemination of information to students and the Head will be sensitive to this.
- Students should be told simply and honestly what has happened. This is probably best done in the smallest groups possible – classes or individually (taking into account past trauma some of the LAC may have faced)
- Questions should be answered in a straightforward way, passing on only facts and avoiding speculation.
- Some classes or individuals may be more directly affected by the incident and will benefit from extra consideration, support and sensitive handling of information. • Siblings and other close relatives of victims should be informed separately and, where possible, in liaison with parents/carers.

Dealing with enquiries

The school may be inundated with telephone calls. People will need to staff the telephone which can be a stressful task. All remaining admin staff and support staff will be briefed by the Proprietor and told which role we most need them to perform. These may include:

- making and/or receiving telephone calls
- dealing with distressed visitors to the school
- sorting and collating information
- organising a parents/carers room
- dealing with "normal" School business

The Head will deal with the majority of communications with the board, proprietors, parents and carers.

- The confidential nature of the task will be emphasised to all telephone operators and clear guidance given on what it is appropriate to say.
- An agreed factual statement prepared by Proprietor or Principal will be available for the telephone operators, which includes reassurance about the action being taken at the School/incident site.
- Those answering the telephones should keep notes and have them checked against School records so that there is certainty about who has telephoned in and who should still be contacted. This should include media, governors, etc.

All staff need to be clear about the facts - who they should tell and what they should tell, and always maintain appropriate standards of confidentiality.

- The Head will consider training for staff in how to deal with difficult/distressed people both in person and on the telephone and will ensure there is a procedure for summoning help to the office in the event of any angry/violent visitors. This work will be very stressful for office staff. The Head Teacher must ensure that:-

- time on task is carefully monitored
- staff take regular breaks
- they have reserve staff on call to lend a hand

School Proprietor or Representative of the Proprietor- Dealing with the media

They will:

- Have a clear and agreed response for the media (school staff are not expected to deal with the media)
- Prepare a brief written statement which can be read out or handed to reporters; stick to the facts and will not be tempted into speculative comments.
- Tell reporters when they can expect further information and aim to work co-operatively with the press.
- In the event of a death prepare some positive comments about the student(s)/ staff who have died and expressions of sympathy for the bereaved family.
- Consider how the Critical Incident Contingency Plan will be disseminated to all staff and where copies of the plan will be kept

7. Supporting Students in the Event of a Critical Incident

Students need access to clear and concise information

- The critical incident team will check that procedures for monitoring staff and students are in place.
- Teachers must stick to the facts and not be tempted to give speculative comments.
- Every member of staff will act promptly to dispel rumours and misinformation which can cause unnecessary distress.

- All staff will be explicit in acknowledgement of the event.

Give opportunities for students to talk through personal reactions

The school will:

- provide a quiet, private place for students to go to.

Allow students to express feelings.

- Anticipate and understand students' reactions.
- Help students realise that grief is a natural and normal reaction to loss.
- Ensure children with previous bereavement/loss/separation experiences and those with special educational needs get the extra support they need.
- Be alert to the possible occurrence of unhelpful grief responses such as anger, bullying and scapegoating - act promptly and positively to defuse and deflect such behaviours.
- Ensure a member of staff makes contact with children at home or in hospital.

Formal grieving

The school will:

- Give opportunities for students to write and draw, send cards or flowers, letters of condolence, attend funerals, plant a tree, etc.
- Hold a special assembly or memorial service as appropriate.
- Be aware of differences in cultural, spiritual, religious values.
- Make plans for attendance at funerals.

Establish normal routines

- The school is the normal place for a child to be and offers security at a time of insecurity.
- Children will look to teachers for role models of how to deal with death and crisis.
- Trauma reactions are normal reactions and are best helped in a normal and familiar environment.
- Returning to the normal routine of School life also reinforces a feeling of security.
- Encourage and support the return to School of students and staff most affected.

- Recognise that emotions and feelings may differ from student to student.
- Strong feelings and emotions are perfectly normal reactions in the immediate aftermath.

8. Supporting Staff

- The school will arrange briefing meetings for staff and arrange debriefing meetings for staff directly affected.
- There should be recognition of the differing needs of each affected individual.
- All staff need to be familiar with the School's Critical Incident Contingency Plan.
- Teachers need to consider their own feelings related to either the present incident or past experiences, so they can feel comfortable in dealing with children's distress.
- Some teachers may wish to take a less active role in supporting others.
- School staff need to be supportive of each other at this time, e.g. staff may wish to schedule staff meetings in order to receive further advice on how to support bereaved children.
- All staff need to be aware of possible delayed reactions, particularly of those actively involved.
- Staff who are coordinating the school's response should be supported and scheduled for relief periods.
- Arrangements may need to be made for staff to see a counsellor or talk with an outside agency/support worker, either singly or as a group.
- Some staff may find it helpful to make a personal gesture, such as by sending cards/flowers, letter of condolence, attending the funeral.
- Decide about attendance at funerals

9. Supporting Parent/carers

Whether the incident has occurred at the school or off site, parents/carers are likely to look to the school for information, advice and support. The school will:

- Prepare a room with tea/coffee making facilities where parents/carers can congregate.
- Allocate a member of staff to be available to talk to parents/carers and keep them up to date with information as it becomes available.

- Provide information leaflets about the impact of trauma and sudden death and likely reactions - these can be prepared and collected in advance by the school as part of the Contingency planning process.
- Provide information about the types of support that are available to them and their children both in school and within their local community
- Contact families of those hurt or bereaved and express sympathy.
- Organise reunion of children with parents.

10. Support from the Therapeutic Team

This support is aimed at helping school staff manage and cope, both professionally and personally, with the impact of the incident on the school and local community. It will be flexible and responsive to the school's needs at all times. Our therapeutic team will also offer a range of support including:

- Advice and help for staff in dealing with distressed students, parents/carers and colleagues.
- Psychological support for those students and adults most closely affected by the incident.
- Advice on dealing with the media and other demands made on School staff at this time.

Advice on issues such as "marking the event" and "getting back to normal".

- Advice on ways to manage the likely short term and long-term effects of the incident on individuals, the school and the local community.

11. Committee/Person Responsible for Policy

This Critical Incident Leadership Team will meet annually to review and update the School's Critical Incident Contingency Plan.

Appendix 1: Example Letter

Dear Parents/Carers

You may have heard/ It is with sadness and regret that I have to inform you (brief details of the incident, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person(s) lost, and the sense of loss)

Explain that the students in School have been told this sad news today by their teachers. And that we will/have remembered in a service/assembly.

Our thoughts are with the parent/carers at this sad time.

[In the event of a sudden/traumatic death in the school or local community – “During the day we have been supported by the Educational Psychology Service and this help will continue as necessary during the coming days”.]

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours faithfully,

Appendix 2: Bibliography

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE 11 YEARS+ Non-Fiction

"My Father Died" and "My Mother Died" by S Wallbank. Cruse - Bereavement Care

"Your Parent Has Died" written and by the Department of Social Work, St Christopher's Hospice, 1991

"Facing Grief: Bereavement and the Young Adult" by S Wallbank. Pub: The Lutterworth Press, 1991 Fiction

"To Hell With Dying" by A Walker. Pub: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989

"Fox in Winter" by J Branfield. Pub: Collins, 1981

"The Friends" by R Guy. Pub: Puffin Plus, 1977

"The Charlie Barber Treatment" by C Lloyd. Pub: Walker, 1989

"Comfort Herself" by G Kaye. Pub: Mammoth, 1984

"Alex" and "Alex in Winter" by T Duder. Pub: Puffin Plus, 1990 and 1991

"In the Springterm Of The Year" by Susan Hill. Pub: Penguin, 1974

"Perfect Happiness" by Penelope Lively. Pub: Penguin, 1985

BOOKS FOR ADULTS DEALING WITH CHILDREN'S GRIEF

"Helping Younger Bereaved Brothers and Sisters" by The Compassionate Friends, 1991

"Caring For Bereaved Children" by Mary Bending. Pub: Cruse - Bereavement Care, 1993

"The Motherless Child" by Dr Dora Black. Pub: Cruse - Bereavement Care

"On Loving Your Child" by D A Torrie. Pub: Cruse - Bereavement Care

"So Will I Comfort You" by J Kander. Pub: Lux Verbi, 1990

"Beyond Grief: A Guide for Recovering from The Death of a Loved One" by C Staudacher. Pub: Souvenir Press, 1987 Further advice regarding these and other publications can be obtained from Cruse - Bereavement Care, 126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 1UR. Tel: 0181 940 4818

Key Source: "Wise Before the Event. Coping with crises in Schools" by William Yule and Anne Gold. Pub: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Appendix 3: Sources of further information

ChildLine provides a free and confidential service for children.

ChildLine Freepost 1111 London N1 OBR

0800 1111

Website <http://www.ChildLine.org.uk>.

Child Death Helpline Freephone 0800 282986

The Samaritans provide a 24-hour service offering confidential emotional support to anyone who is in crisis. Telephone helpline 0345 90 90 90

The Young Minds Parent Information Service provides information and advice on child mental health issues.

102-108 Clerkenwell Road

LONDON

EC1M 5SA

Telephone 0800 018 2138

Winston's Wish for anyone caring for a child who has been bereaved:
Winston's Wish

Clara Burgess Centre

Bayshill Road

CHELTENHAM GL50 3AW

Telephone 0845 20 30 40 5

Email: info@winstonswish.org.uk

Appendix 4: Useful contacts

As part of the contingency plan, this list of contacts should be obtained as a matter of course. Their phone numbers can be added to this page and the whole list can be attached to the staff notice board or the school handbook, and regularly updated. Office support staff should also have such a list readily available.

Contact	Name	Contact Details
Chair of Board	Barbara Dansey	01689857877
Police		999
Fire Brigade		999
Ambulance		999
Representative of Proprietor	Simon Bayliss	07840133826
School Head Teacher	Alison Neal	07904864598
Little Acorns School		01233850422
School Counselor		
Emergency Department at Local Hospital	William Harvey Hospital	01233633331
Social Services Area Team Leader		03000 41 11 11

