



Critical Incident Policy

Written October 2023



At All Saints Academy, it is our vision to provide the 'good soil' for every member of our community to develop deep roots and flourish as a unique individual and achieve their full potential. With the highest of expectations, we nurture and develop each individual so that they can explore who they are and make a positive contribution to our local community and the wider world.



A loving place where we all care, learn and grow together.

Our school values at All Saints Academy:

- Respect
- Kindness
- Perseverance
- Honesty
- Courage
- Empathy

Our vision and values are central to all that we do. They are promoted through our curriculum, they run through our policies and they inform our day to day decision making.

Introduction

A critical incident can be described as an event or events outside the range of normal human experience, of significant personal distress to a level which potentially overwhelms normal responses, procedures and coping strategies and which is likely to have emotional and organisational consequences. Although handling critical incidents is not a normal part of school life, we must prepare our school community so we are able to deal with a critical incident in the best way possible

Examples of critical incidents

- The sudden death of a pupil or member of staff
- A serious accident involving pupils and/or school personnel on or off the premises
- A violent act on school premises by malicious persons, either in person or by means such as arson, bomb, vandalism etc.
- A school building becoming unsafe as a result of fire, flood or other incident
- A more widespread emergency in the community, for example the release of hazardous substances, severe weather, flooding etc.
- Severe power loss
- Public health threats (e.g. meningitis outbreak)

Other events also deemed to be emergencies

- An incident in the community which is seen or experienced by pupils or staff
- An incident affecting relatives of pupils which is known about in the school
- An incident affecting a nearby school or other SMAT school

- Civil disturbances or terrorism

Important factors include:

- The suddenness of the occurrence
- The shock effect
- The apparent uniqueness of the occurrence
- The need for any support to be available very rapidly
- The publicity and attention which sometimes follows
- The need to communicate with a number of people quickly
- The need for support for those directly affected
- Number who might be indirectly affected (pupils, teachers and parents).

Critical Incidents Procedures

When schools face a critical incident, research suggests that they cope best when they have clear procedures and know how to use support networks. Staff need to be as fully prepared as possible before any such incident occurs. Many schools and organisations have found it useful to have a Critical Incident Team (CIT). The schools Senior Leadership Team and the Trust Senior Leadership Teams will take on the functions of the CIT when a critical incident occurs.

The headteacher should call a meeting of this team at least annually to update names, contact numbers and procedures.

Immediate action

Ensure the appropriate emergency services have been contacted (as required) and convene the Critical Incident Team (CIT).

Gather information

It is important to collect as much information as possible about the incident. This information should be documented and kept as a written log. The following should be included:

- What happened
- Where and when the incident took place
- Whether there is still a continuing danger
- If the incident happened off-site, what help is required from the school/Trust
- The numbers and names of those injured and the extent of their injuries
- The current location of those injured
- The location of pupils who were involved but not injured
- The name and contact number of an adult at the incident site (if off-site)
- The name and contact number of local police

Assess continuing risk

Is it likely that further injuries or damage may occur? **If there is a continuing risk, the first priority must be to safeguard the welfare of the pupils, staff and visitors.** It is vital that before any remedial work is done by the Critical Incident Team, that any ongoing risks to safety are mitigated. Ensure that any immediate action to protect people or property does not give rise to further risk.

Brief the Critical Incident Team

Identify if additional members may be needed, e.g. staff with particular expertise.

The headteacher has responsibility for what happens in the school and is therefore responsible for the actions of the Critical Incident Team. In the absence of the headteacher, the Assistant Headteacher would take on this role.

The purpose of the briefing is to share information gathered about the incident and allocate responsibility for immediate and short-term tasks.

Evacuation

If an evacuation of the building is necessary, we have an agreement with All Saints church and parish hall where we would be welcomed and supported. If this arrangement fails, we would also have access to Upperwood Academy, Darfield.

Contact appropriate agencies

St Marys Academy Trust will be informed as part of the CIT.

In all circumstances, the Chair of Governors should be contacted in a timely manner, at a point when risk has been minimised.

It may be necessary to contact the Local Authority, the Educational Psychology Service and Social Care Service.

Action within the first hour

Communication to and from school

Methods of communication will be carefully considered based on the nature of the critical incident and who has been directly and indirectly involved.

Contact the parent/carers of those directly involved

The school will maintain an up-to-date list of emergency contact telephone numbers for pupils and staff, and ensure it has an effective procedure for knowing who is on site. When releasing information, an agreed statement will be shared with care. The statement will share the appropriate facts and express sympathy and/or concern.

In the event of serious injury or death, the police will be involved and are likely to take responsibility for informing relatives in person. However, it may be helpful for them to be accompanied by a member of staff.

If the contact person cannot be reached by telephone, leave a brief message asking them to telephone a particular number. Avoid leaving complex messages as these can become distorted when conveyed and cause additional distress.

Contact the parents/carers of those NOT directly involved

When releasing information to a wider audience, as before, an agreed statement will be shared with care. The statement will share the appropriate facts.

When releasing information, blame and liability should not be attributed.

When the news of an incident reaches the community, it is likely a large number of people will want to contact the school for details. This could jam the main telephone line, making it difficult for outside calls to be made and for essential calls with information about the incident getting through. If possible, dedicate particular lines to outgoing calls and incoming calls.

Callers phoning the usual school line should be given an **agreed statement** and reassurance that action is being taken to manage the situation. If further details are requested, ask the caller to leave a name and number on which they can be contacted. Be courteous but concise to keep the line free for other callers.

Inform school staff

Provide staff with the factual details of the incident so that they can feel confident when handling questions and issues. Tell them when this information will be next updated. Encourage staff to refer enquiries to the Critical Incident Team when in doubt. Ask them not to talk to the media. This minimises the risk of mixed messages and misinformation.

Inform pupils

Consider carefully the most appropriate way of informing pupils of a critical incident. If the school takes on the role of informing pupils, tell pupils what has happened and allow them to ask questions. Decide whether it is better to talk to large groups, small groups or individuals. This process is often best managed in small groups, by a member of staff who is well known to the pupils and confident in handling their reactions. The age of pupils needs to be considered, any additional needs of pupils and specific vulnerabilities (e.g. previous traumas).

During school holidays/weekends, parents/carers may need to be informed via letter sent via email. Parents/carers should be signposted to external agencies who can support them.

Handling the media

Communications with the media **must** be handled through the Trust Senior Leadership Team and school Senior Leadership Team. An **agreed statement** should be used for consistency. Advice may be taken from the solicitors.

We are entitled to say who can enter the school and who cannot. Members of the press should not enter without permission.

Action within the next few hours

Arrange debriefing for staff and pupils involved in the incident. The nature of debriefing sessions will depend on the incident. We might find it helpful to consider a different process for:

- Casualties
- Witnesses
- The wider community

We will inform neighbouring schools, especially where siblings are at other schools.

Develop a plan for handling the feelings and reactions of others

We will be alert to possible staff reactions, even among those who are not directly involved but for whom the incident triggers difficult emotions. Outside agencies can offer support and advice to staff.

Longer-term action

Continuing or quickly re-establishing normal routines

Every attempt will be made to provide as much continuity as possible for pupils. We will maintain the normal school day, as far as possible, so that pupils are unsettled as little as possible.

Support for pupils and staff

If we face a major critical incident, we will utilise the resources of our school community, Trust community and Local Authority to support us through the difficulties. School staff may feel responsible for supporting the pupil or class during a period of crisis. However, they also have to deal with their own emotions. There are several reactions connected with being a professional person having responsibility for the support of children and young people. Feelings of helplessness and inadequacy in the face of others' grief and pain are not uncommon. Shock, embarrassment, guilt and a wish to push down the emotions are all natural reactions at such times. In some circumstances we will need extra help from specialist services, such as Educational Psychology Service, health trusts or religious or voluntary organisations. In the aftermath of a major incident, especially one attracting media attention, we may be inundated with offers of help from voluntary groups and individuals. We will need to select and manage such offers carefully to meet the best interests of pupils and staff.

It is important that staff members have support networks readily available and feel able to ask for help. Senior staff need to be aware that these reactions may occur and should seek

appropriate guidance from outside agencies. As part of St Mary Academy Trust, we have access to a counselling service which staff can be referred to as required.

It is also important to remember that staff are not trained counsellors. They are not expected to offer bereavement counselling. Listening and being available for comfort are the main skills required. However, if a member of staff feels unable to offer support, this should be acknowledged and accepted, and another colleague should be considered for the role.

Information sharing sessions for pupils

Evidence suggests that when pupils are directly involved as witnesses to a traumatic incident, they benefit from structured debriefing sessions. Debriefing can also benefit pupils on the periphery of an incident. This enables them to express what they saw or heard, how it affected them and how they feel about it in retrospect.

We will usually handle this process ourselves. For more demanding and emotive situations, however, specialist support is valuable. Specialist help needs careful planning and is likely to be given between one and four weeks after the incident. It is essential to get parental consent for any pupil's involvement.

Identify any inappropriate content of the curriculum

Pupils who have recently been traumatised are especially sensitive to reminders. Children's literature, assembly stories and episodes in history all provide sources of likely triggers. We will not avoid such references altogether, but anticipate likely reactions and ensure that teachers feel able to manage them.

Managing trauma

The management of a critical incident can result in a great deal of stress for those involved. It is therefore important to:

- Acknowledge the emotional state of staff and pupils and allow time and space when needed
- Acknowledge that some staff may not wish to or be able to be directly involved in supporting pupils
- Be aware that the burden of support may fall disproportionately on a small number of staff
- Acknowledge that the incident may act as a trigger to pupils who are emotionally vulnerable, even if they are not directly involved. This may result in difficulties in behaviour and relationships

New staff starting at the school, after the event, would need to be made aware of the critical incident.

Formal and informal recognition and rituals

Arrangements may be made to express sympathy to the families directly affected by the incident, for example:

- Injured pupils can be visited in hospital
- Pupils can be encouraged to send cards and letters. Set up a memorial area where pupils can leave messages of condolence
- Plan to attend a funeral, if welcomed by the family involved
- Discuss the desirability of holding special assemblies and memorial services
- Anniversaries are key times and we will ensure such times are planned for and handled with sensitivity

Return to school by pupils or staff

Pupils and staff who were injured or distressed as a direct result of the incident will need significant support to reintegrate back into school life.

We must remember to provide help to others returning to school after an absence, for example:

- Staff and pupils on sick leave at the time of the incident
- Those who were not at the school on the day of the incident and who learned of events afterwards.

Monitoring and Reviewing

The Head Teacher is responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of this policy on a regular basis. The school governing body has the responsibility to support the Head teacher in implementing and reviewing the effectiveness of the Critical Incident Policy.