

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSE RESOURCE



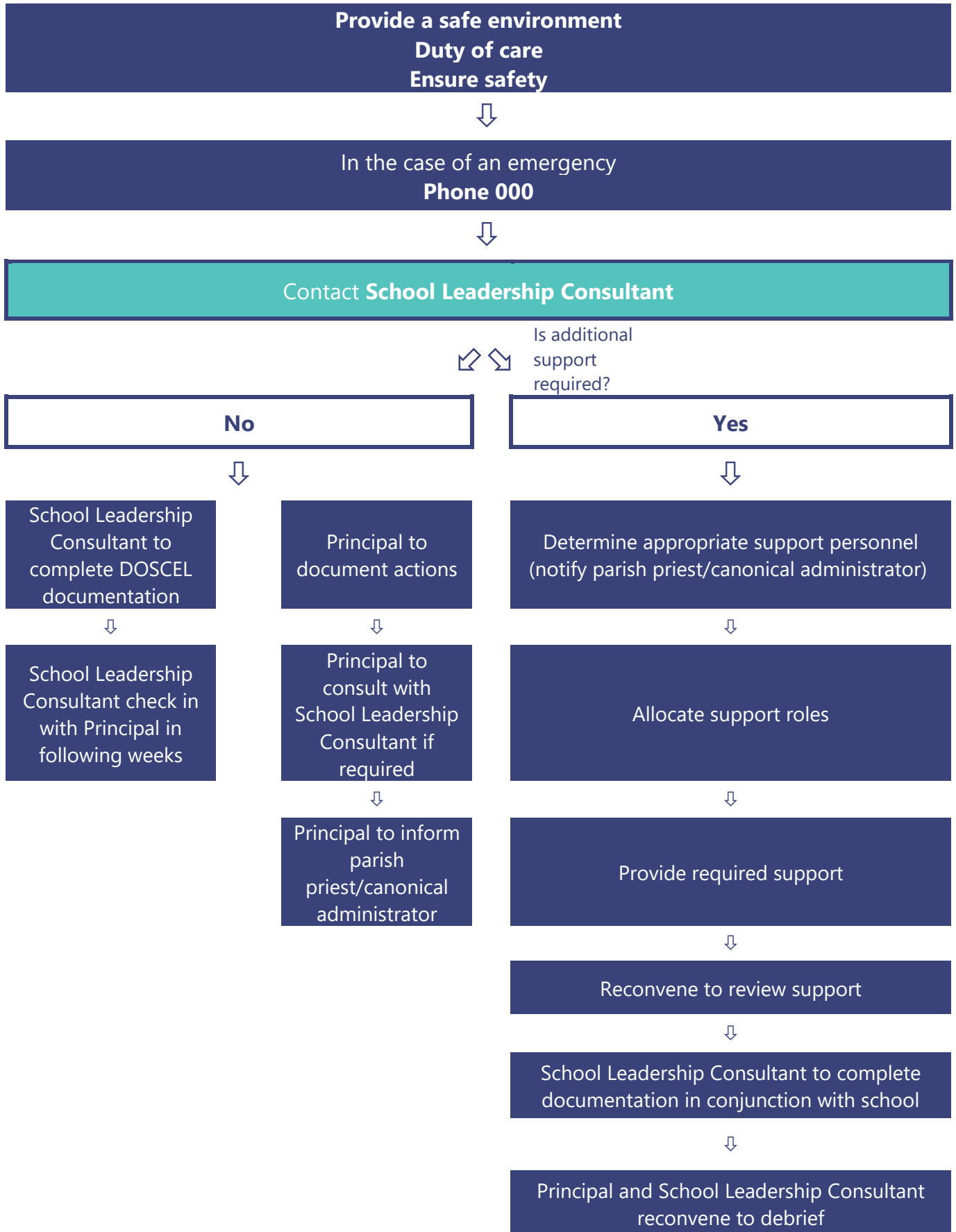
Diocese of Sale
Catholic Education Ltd

Inspiring *Faith* Inspiring *Learning*

CONTENTS

Process for Critical Incident Response	4
School Leadership Consultant Immediate Checklist	4
Contacts	5
Critical Incident Response Team	7
Critical Incident Risk Register	8
PLANNING AND PREPARATION	9
GUIDELINES FOR GENERAL CRITICAL INCIDENTS	15
Short Term Recovery-First 24 Hours	19
Medium Term Recovery-During the First Week	25
Long Term Recovery	27
GUIDELINES FOR NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY	29
Initial Discovery, Disclosure or Suspicion	31
Rules	32
Managing and Preventing Contagion	32
Assessment	33
Engaging Parents and the Referral Process	33
Response Process	35
GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH SUICIDE	37
Immediate Response	40
The First 24 hours	44
The First Week	52
The First Month	60
The Long Term	63
Communication	68
Response Plan	76
APPENDICES	77
Common Reactions	81
Administration Staff Support	87
Record Keeping	88
Return to School Plan	89
Letters	91
Prayer Response to a Critical Incident or Traumatic Event	99
Reporting Obligations	112
Managing Media	113
Activities For Managing Loss And Grief	118
References	124

Process for Critical Incident Response



*see Appendices for [Record Keeping Template](#)

Contacts

**Insert
Phone Tree
Here**

Contact	Number
Police	
Fire Brigade	
Ambulance	
Hospital Emergency Department	
State Emergency Service	
DHHS	
Poisons Information	
School Leadership Consultant	
Parish Priest/Canonical Administrator	
Neighbouring School:	
Neighbouring School:	

**Phone Tree Message
Here**

[Back to Contents](#)

Critical Incident Response Team

Role	Name or Position	Contact
CIRT Coordinator		
Communications		
Identifier of students/staff at risk		
Police Liaison		
DOSCEL Secretariat Liaison		
Media Liaison		
Support services Liaison		
Family Liaison		
Documentation		
School Leadership Consultant		
Parish Priest		

Critical Incident Risks

Year:	
Date Developed:	
Review Date:	

Risk	Level of Risk	Actions	Timeline	Responsibility

CRITICAL INCIDENT PLANNING AND PREPARATION



CRITICAL INCIDENT

Catholic schools have a responsibility to provide a safe and supportive environment for staff, students and members of the community. The wellbeing of students, staff and community members can be adversely affected by crisis events. Appropriate planning and intervention can reduce the likelihood of such events and mitigate the impact should a crisis occur.

A critical incident may be defined as an event which causes disruption to an organisation or significant danger or risk, resulting in a situation where staff, students and parents may feel unsafe, vulnerable and distressed either emotionally or psychologically. Some critical incidents may result from emergencies occurring outside the school environment such as serious injury to a student whilst holidaying with family. This may affect teachers and students in ways which the school needs to address. A critical incident may not necessarily require an initial emergency response.

Critical incidents that may affect the school community include:

- the death/serious injury of a student, staff member or school community member
- the destruction of the whole, or part, of the school
- the murder of a student, staff member or school community member
- death or misadventure on a school excursion
- students witnessing serious injury or death
- staff member, student, sibling or parent suicide
- flooding or other natural disasters
- terminal illness of a member of the school community
- use of violent weapons in the school
- outsiders coming into school and being aggressive to students and staff
- disappearance of a student or staff member or school community member
- social abuse of students or staff members where safety is compromised
- major vandalism
- media coverage of issues in a way which creates concerns in the school community.

Each school community is unique, so what may be considered a critical incident in one community, may not be considered a critical incident in another community.

CRITICAL INCIDENT PREPARATION AND PLANNING

A planned process in which prevention, response and recovery activity that is well coordinated, can reduce the impact of critical incident. A well thought out and documented school management plan helps to bring a measure of control and order to a critical incident. The measure of calm which pre-planned procedures bring to an event can, in turn, influence individual or group's perceptions about whether it is traumatic or not.

A well-written plan should describe how school personnel will respond to an immediate threat during a critical incident. The incident itself, and the threat to physical safety is typically short lived, often lasting minutes or a few hours. Planning for a critical incident should provide for the psychological safety and wellbeing of staff and students as well as their physical safety. The plan should describe how the school will assist those affected to recover from their involvement or exposure to the critical incident.

Pre-planning provides a framework for response and recovery that enables a logical course of action to be taken at a time when the school's decision makers will be involved in the hectic activity and confusion which often accompanies a critical incident. It allows support mechanisms to be implemented quickly.

The School Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT)

Each school should have its own team to handle critical incident responses. Members of the team should be chosen based on their leadership roles in the school. These individuals must be willing and able to assist the school administration in carrying out the critical incident plan. It is important that membership is according to roles rather than individuals to avoid issues when staff members are on leave or are directly affected by a critical incident. This allows for a staff member acting in the designated role to perform the duties required. Membership of a School Critical Incident Response Team should be overseen by the principal or principal's delegate and may include members of the Leadership Team and other relevant personnel.

The first task of the school team should be to develop the school plan or protocol. It is important that this plan include a list of the names, roles and after hours contact telephone numbers of all school team members. Clear communication is essential so that the teams can be mobilised quickly in the event of an incident.

A printed handbook or pamphlet on the school's critical incident response protocol should be available to each staff member and parent. Parents should be informed about the plan and translated materials should be available when appropriate and feasible. Examination of existing critical incident and sudden death protocols shows that they contain some common features:

- introductory material describing the importance of effective critical incident response procedures and planning
- clear, easy to follow steps in an action plan for the principal and team to use as a guide for following a critical incident
- delineation of roles and responsibilities for individuals in the school community in carrying out the plan
- strategies for providing psychological first aid for both students and staff
- plans for identifying individuals at risk after a crisis
- alternative procedures for off-site programs, if needed
- support materials such as sample formats for class meetings, staff meetings, communications with parents, information about grief and stress reactions, and a list of individuals and agencies with contact phone numbers so the school team can readily obtain assistance in a hurry.

When developing the critical incident plan, the following roles should be considered:

- liaising with family
- identifying vulnerable students, staff and close friends for personal contact and follow up
- preparing written information for students, staff and parents
- securing students electronic/email accounts
- liaising with mental health professionals
- liaising with police
- protecting student belongings (secure student's locker)
- liaising with DOSCEL Secretariat
- managing all incoming and outgoing information (including phone calls, emails, sympathy cards, newspaper notices, etc.)
- managing media contact
- documenting all actions.

The school's postvention work will be helped if the following guidelines are followed.

All members of the CIRT should have an individual copy of the guidelines. Generally, it will be necessary for the CIRT to meet at least daily for the first week following the event, and consistency in adhering to delegated roles is critical.

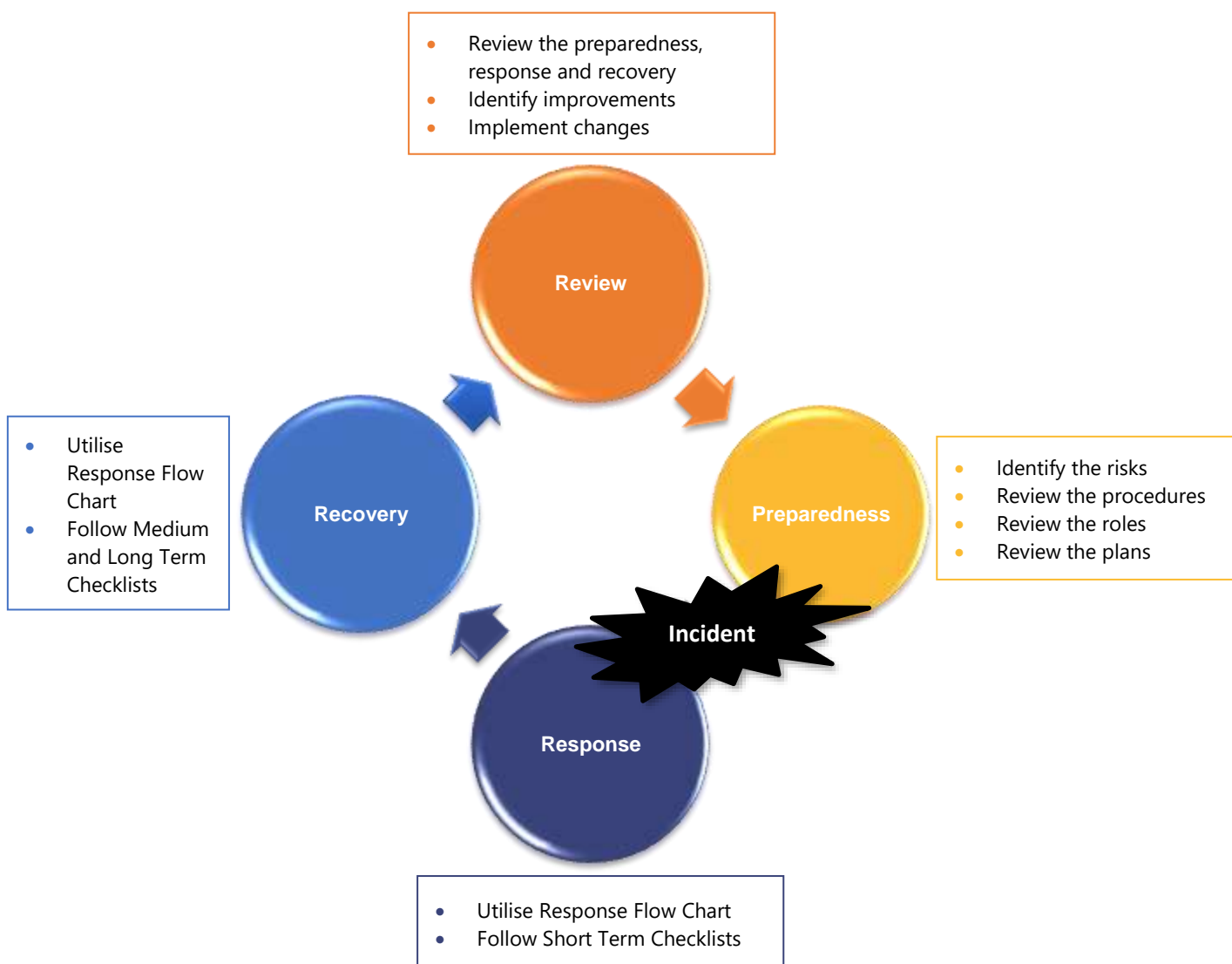
Training

Critical incidents occur without warning and require a timely and strategic response. It is important that regular training be provided so that each person of the CIRT is familiar with the entire plan, confident in what his or her role is, and has developed the skills necessary to carry out the plan. This ensures that staff are prepared and practiced and are able to respond effectively.

It is recommended that schools regularly review protocols and processes regarding critical incidents.

The impact of a critical incident can be reduced by a planned process in which prevention, response and recovery activities are well coordinated.

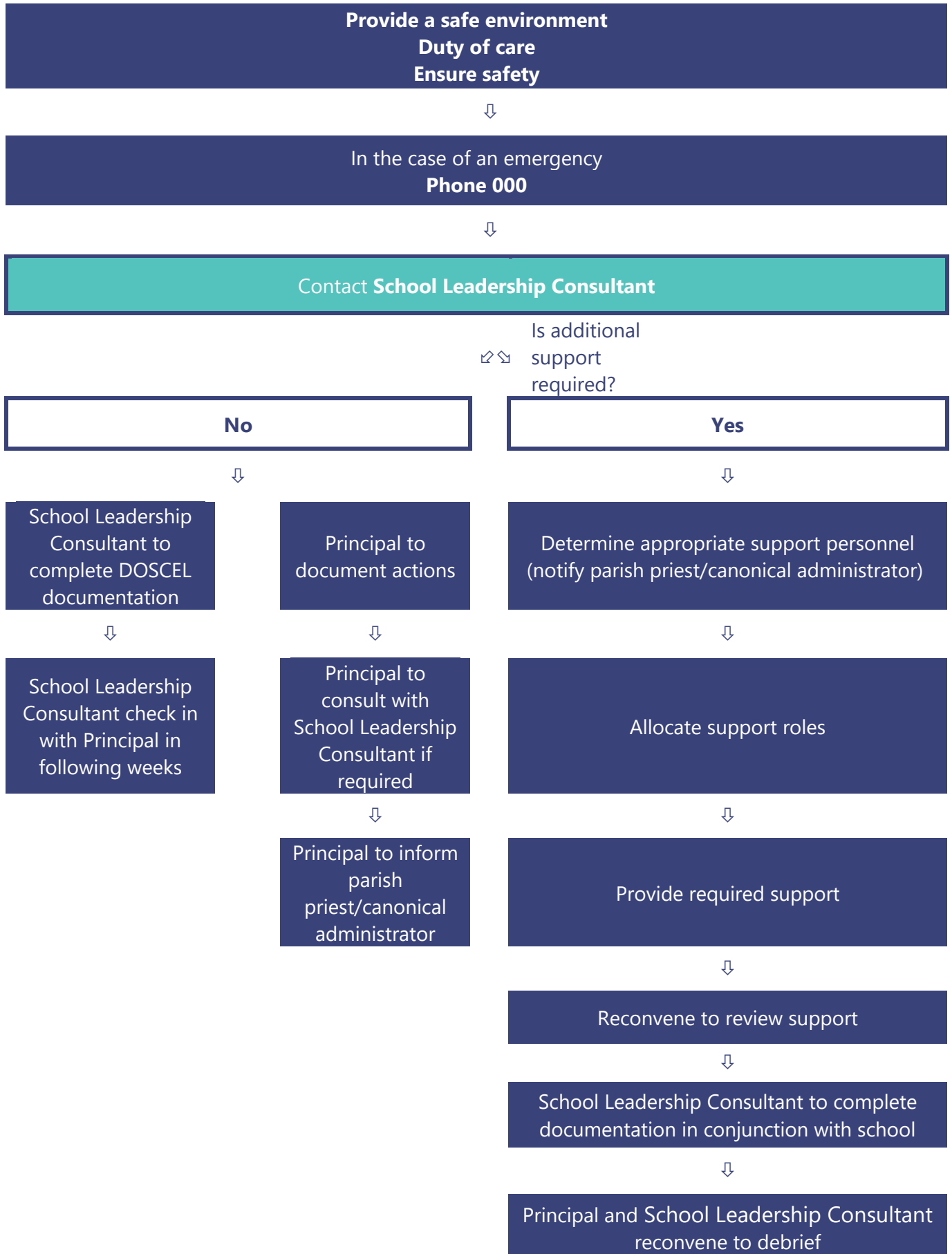
Critical Incident Planning and Preparation Cycle



GUIDELINES FOR GENERAL CRITICAL INCIDENTS



Process for Critical Incident Response



*see Appendices for [Record Keeping Template](#)

Short Term Recovery - First 24 hours

Set aside five minutes to calm down and collect your thoughts. Implement the school emergency plan. Consider the level of response that might be required, and discuss possible responses with others.

Short Term Tasks - First 24 hours Checklist

- Ensure that staff and students are safe from injury or harm
- [Notify the emergency services using their emergency numbers if required](#)
- Determine the facts
- [Notify Diocese of Sale Catholic Education Limited Secretariat](#)
- Call a meeting of the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) to coordinate the response
 - Confirm response team members know and understand their responsibilities according to plan;
 - responsibility for evacuation and assembly of staff and students if required
 - responsibility for management of information including telephone calls
 - responsibility for coordinating media requests for information
 - responsibility for provision of information parents who arrive at the school
- [Record details on the initial critical incident record](#)
- [Contact canonical administrator](#)
- Notify parents of students first, then brothers and sisters in the school
- [Notify teachers and ancillary staff about the critical incident](#)
- [Inform students within the school of the critical incident](#)
- [Coordinate routine school activities including the teaching program](#)
- [Establish a support room for affected students and a waiting room for parents](#)
- Ask for staff volunteers to monitor the support room
- Designate prayer/quiet space. Those who require additional support should use support room
- [Organise prayer service if/when appropriate](#)
- [Inform the school community via letter or newsletter](#)
- [Monitor social media](#)
- Liaise with outside agencies, including emergency services
- [Monitor school community reactions and support those in care-giving roles](#)
- Set aside time to debrief key personnel and to review responses

Short Term Tasks — Informing Staff

Having verified information:

- provide teachers and ancillary staff (such as administrative staff and learning support officers) with a brief outline of the incident
- provide a brief factual outline to others within the school community on a need-to-know basis
- inform staff as soon as possible about a serious emergency involving death or injury which occurs after hours, on the weekend or during school holidays
- inform staff about arrangements for holding a briefing meeting before informing students at the start of the next school day.

Short Term Tasks — Briefing Staff

The critical incident staff meeting presents an opportunity to provide known facts, dispel rumours and to establish a common reference base. It also provides an opportunity to outline the preliminary recovery management arrangements.

Before the start of the school day

- verify and restate factual information about the incident, so that staff can understand what has happened and the information will sink in
- talk with staff about the reactions they may experience
- outline recovery management arrangements
- inform staff about procedures for dealing with the media
- discuss procedures to be followed by staff during the day
- discuss guidelines for informing their students and ways of answering questions from students
- provide teachers with a written summary for use as a reference when discussing the incident with students
- ensure that staff have time to have their questions answered and to talk about the incident amongst themselves.

At the end of the day

- meet with staff to review the day, to allow staff to share the trauma of the day, and identify students at risk
- ensure that school critical incident team members are available to offer support and guidance.

Short Term Tasks - Informing Close Friends

- notify close friends of the dead or injured, including girlfriends or boyfriends, prior to making an announcement to other students
- take students aside when they arrive at school and inform them privately
- consider contacting the students or their families at home prior to the start of the school day
- ensure that individual attention is given to intimate friends who are likely to have special needs beyond those of other students.

Short Term Tasks - Informing Students

The classroom setting enables teachers to monitor individual reactions within a supportive environment. Death, injury or other significant critical incidents are usually more effectively managed in a classroom setting rather than at a general assembly or over the public address system. Teachers should establish a climate of open communication to help students work through issues such as unresolved conflicts which traumatic events may cause to resurface.

Principal or senior staff

- contact the bereaved family or police to ascertain what information may be released within the school
- prepare a factual written statement, without graphic detail, for use as a reference by teachers when discussing the incident with students
- determine when and where students will be told about the incident
- consider the needs of teachers who feel uncomfortable raising the event with students and arrange for support from another teacher or a member of the recovery team
- identify staff who may be too distraught to take classes and arrange replacements from within the school, from neighbouring schools or casual teachers
- inform students soon after briefing staff
- ask teachers to mark a roll to identify who has been informed and who has not.

Teachers

- provide a factual account of the incident at the beginning of the first class, in a way that ensures that everyone hears the same information
- limit speculation and rumour by providing factual and relevant information about the incident
- inform students about the location of support services and recovery rooms
- inform students about arrangements for memorial services, funerals and appropriate ways to express condolences
- outline arrangements for the day.

Short Term Tasks—Setting up Support Rooms

The value of support rooms is that they provide a safe, supervised location where students', staff and parents' grief and needs can be expressed, responded to and monitored. This room should be staffed by appropriate personnel.

Be mindful to:

- designate a room where people know they can quickly locate support staff
- ask for a staff volunteer, preferably with psychological first-aid knowledge, to supervise the recovery room and to support those who are very distressed
- monitor students for shock reactions and have someone available to provide psychological first-aid if required
- set up a student recovery room well away from classrooms, or several rooms during a large incident, close to toilets and with comfortable chairs and tissues
- provide a separate recovery room for staff
- allow distressed staff members and students reasonable access to the room
- ensure that several adults are available to monitor and assist students during a large or complex incident where a large number of students may be affected
- set aside a room for parents with tea and coffee making facilities, which is separate from students to avoid having them congregate around the school
- encourage students to gather in smaller friendship groups rather than larger groups
- keep a list of students who are attending the support room
- contact parents of students who remain in the recovery room and alert them about possible concerns.

Short Term Tasks - In the Classroom

There will be wide range of reactions to the news of an incident, injury or death. Some students may be visibly affected while others may show no sign of distress. Dealing with, and responding to, news of an emergency is a very individual experience. Individual characteristics, such as how a person interprets the event, previous experiences and the relationship to the injured or deceased are all factors that influence how people will respond.

Young children and adolescents can be traumatised by what they hear from others about an incident. Use protective interrupting strategies if a story or details become too graphic for some students. Protective interrupting requires the teacher to stop an anecdote being told in a public forum. It may be possible to change the direction of a discussion by distracting or diverting the student. The student should be given an opportunity to tell the story in a more appropriate setting alone with the teacher.

It is useful to:

- allow opportunities to talk about the incident and reactions, taking the opportunity to explain that different people respond in different ways
- explain that a range of reactions may be experienced, that the reactions are normal, that people react in a range of ways and with time and support the reactions will ease
- repeat the facts as often as requested
- allow students to opt out of discussion
- encourage older children to talk and to piece together a clear picture of what happened
- use the natural tendency of children to repeatedly question what happened as a useful means of dispelling rumours and myths.

Short Term Tasks - Supporting Students

Initial support for students involves psychological first aid. Counselling is not appropriate at this stage. When providing support to students try to:

- provide support and comfort
- sit quietly with the child, say little, accept silence
- accept initial emotional reactions
- use minimal prompts such as “you’ve had a frightening experience”
- tell children that you are sorry such an event occurred and you want to understand and assist them
- provide information about what has happened and what is being done to help
- use active listening and empathy skills
- be alert for anyone who appears to be in shock who may need medical attention
- acknowledge the experience and normalise the reactions “you’ve had a frightening experience—no wonder your hands are shaking”
- bring a calm presence to the situation
- provide ongoing support to individuals when they receive additional information such as notification of deaths, or when collecting personal effects
- ensure that support is available at home before the student leaves the scene
- be guided by the child and listen to what the individual wants
- start from the children’s point of understanding
- ask children to tell you what happened in their own words
- allow opportunity for play, some children seek to get a better understanding of what happened through play
- allow children to talk over concerns with someone they have chosen, including another teacher
- respect the need for adolescents to seek support from their peer group and to be with their friends rather than with adults.

Try to avoid statements in which students are told:

- it will be all right, because it may not be
- they are lucky it wasn't worse, as such statements rarely console anyone who is traumatised
- about death using abstract explanations or euphemisms, gone to sleep, passed away
- how they are feeling.

Short Term Tasks – Monitor Social Media

The term 'social media' commonly refers to websites that facilitate communication and networking between people. Messages posted on these social media platforms can have a large impact because they can quickly reach an enormous number of people.

This form of communication can cause unnecessary anxiety and distress during a critical incident due to misinformation provided, rumour, derogatory message and comments. Social media is very difficult to control however, there are a number of actions you can take

Social media expectations

Before a critical incident occurs, it is important to build an understanding within the school community about responsible ways of utilising social media. This means that people will have a better understanding regarding what is appropriate to communicate and what the expectations of the school are when members of the community share information about the school. For information that can be provided to parents refer to page 116 [Social Media and the School Community](#).

Disseminate information

Schools may already have a website or an online presence (or page) on one or more social media sites (students and/or parents can help identify others that are currently popular). These can be used to proactively communicate with students, teachers, and parents. Social media can be used to pass on information about the funeral or memorial service and give out details of where members of the community can seek help and support (including phone numbers for Kids Helpline and Lifeline).

Monitor and respond

Where possible, social media sites (including a deceased's profile page or school's organisation page) should be monitored for rumours, derogatory messages about the incident. Respond by dispelling rumours, reinforcing any messages and offering resources for support. See Appendices for '[Removing Inappropriate Content from Social Media](#)' for support in responding to social media issues.

School processes

Be aware of any school processes that may cause distress to parents and staff. For example, stop automated messages re absence to the family and reminders for school fees.

Short Term Tasks - Informing Parents and the School Community

Parents, school councillors, other members of the school community and neighbouring schools will want to know what has happened and to assist if possible. It is important that they are given factual information and that the information has been approved for public release.

The critical incident team will:

- confirm the release of information with those directly affected and to the police
- send a letter to parents about the incident
- advise parents about the recovery arrangements which have been put in place
- provide copies of the common reactions to trauma pamphlets to parents
- explain to parents that adolescents are likely to seek comfort from their peer group rather than their parents and adults
- provide a recovery room for parents and run parent briefings as required

The letter should have five functions ([example letters](#) are included in the Appendices of this document).

It tells parents:

1. the facts
2. what the school has done
3. the school's plans
4. how their children may react
5. how to get help

Medium Term Recovery - During the First Week

Medium-term critical incident management requires school personnel charged with the responsibility of managing emergencies to restore school routine. At the same time, provision should be made for the ongoing support of members of the school community. It is at this time that funerals and associated rituals take place and when people are often most emotionally vulnerable, yet wanting to return to normal.

Parents are likely to discuss reactions their children are experiencing such as physical and emotional tiredness and degrees of sleep disturbance. Parents may need an opportunity to discuss their own tiredness and the need to protect their children after a life threatening event. Children may indicate a desire for the return of routine and normality. Most children grieve intermittently rather than continuously. There may be times when children seem to have forgotten the death or the emergency. Flashbacks can be triggered for months and even years.

Medium Term Tasks - During the First Week Checklist

- Restore regular school routine
- Provide information updates about the condition of anyone in hospital
- Prepare public expressions of farewell such as obituaries and wreaths when a death has occurred
- Monitor and support reactions within the school community
- Reiterate information about reactions as required
- Allow opportunities to talk about the incident and reactions
- Provide information and encourage support networks among parents
- Liaise with community support agencies such as the parish, funeral directors, community health centres
- Consider referring students with persistent behaviour changes to a counsellor or specialist agency
- Consider whether a request for information should be made or whether any information should be voluntarily provided to another prescribed Information Sharing Entity (**ISE**) under the Child Information Sharing Scheme (**CISS**) or Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (**FVISS**)
- Use specialist support staff to assist students, parents and staff
- Monitor media coverage to identify areas which may cause difficulty or distress
- Use replacement class room teachers to enable staff to attend the funeral
- Be aware of cultural and religious differences in response to death and what the funeral may entail
- Refer staff who are concerned with issues of legal liability to professional associations and CEO
- Suggest that staff make detailed notes for their personal reference about the event and their part in it
- Suggest that staff obtain copies of any official statements they make

Medium Term Tasks - Funerals

Rituals serve an important function for both adults and children. These rituals assist in:

- reducing unreality
- counteracting fantasies
- getting some understanding of what is happening
- helping individuals to work through the event
- saying goodbye
- establishing a shared understanding of the event.

Viewing the body

In some cultures, viewing the body is seen as an important part of the ritual. Students can be helped through this process by an adult who is able to describe what they will see when they enter the room. An adult who enters the room first to see the dead person is then able to describe the room to those students who wish to view the body. The description can also include the casket and how the appearance of the dead person may have changed, eg visually and in terms of touch and temperature change. It is equally important for adults to be prepared for this experience.

Attending the funeral

It is generally beneficial for children to attend the funeral, although they should not be forced to attend against their wishes. Before the funeral the child should be given detailed description of:

- what will happen
- what the room will look like
- what the casket will look like
- information about the service
- what the burial will entail
- possible adult reactions during the rituals
- how they might feel themselves

It may be helpful to invite the priest conducting the service to be available to answer students' questions and to describe the planned ceremony.

Some families are willing to allow classmates to assist in planning the rituals. They may be able to participate in the ceremony by reading eulogies choosing music, or by placing a flower on the casket.

It is also important for adults to be prepared for the funeral ceremony. There are a range of cultural and religious differences in response to death and it is essential that members of the school community who are attending the funeral are briefed beforehand on what will happen during the ceremony and burial.

There are also some practical needs to consider when large numbers of students are attending a funeral:

- to minimise fainting or hyperventilation encourage students to remove coats or jumpers prior to the ceremony
- have a first-aid trained person to assist distressed students
- have cold drinks and cool face washers available
- prepare for a media presence at the funeral
- invite students and staff to return to school for coffee and sandwiches after the funeral to allow monitoring of reactions and support
- organise a time for students not attending the funeral to bring their memorials and floral tributes to a nominated room at school and for someone to take them to the funeral of their behalf.

Long Term Recovery

Long term recovery management requires a continuing awareness of individual needs and reactions and a process for managing those responses.

It is also useful at this time to re-examine the school's critical incident plan, to revise the plan on the basis of what worked well and what didn't work. Strategies which were found to be useful during the critical incident should be included in the plan for future use.

Recovery can take up to three years or even longer. Significant dates or events such as anniversaries, or the taking of annual school photos may bring about re-emergence of symptoms. Six months after the initial incident is a critical time. The affected group may feel forgotten as time passes by and relationship problems may emerge. Those who were drawn together by a shared experience are likely to start pulling away from each other and establishing new networks. Family cohesion may be altered as different members grieve and respond differently.

Grief, longing and pain may be particularly strong or may return on anniversary dates such as birthdays, the date that the incident occurred, or other significant dates such as Christmas. Marking these days may be helpful in giving concrete expression to such feelings. Individuals may continue responding to triggers that remind them of the event for a long time. For example, hot, windy days often unsettle people who have experienced bushfires for many years after the experience.

Long Term Tasks Checklist

- Acknowledge the work of school-based and specialist care givers and continue to monitor their wellbeing, particularly when things start to quieten down and they may start to reveal their own views about the experience
- Monitor and support members of the school community, particularly on significant dates such as anniversaries
- Monitor students for signs of change including relationship problems, drug dependency, hyper arousal, increased susceptibility to illness and accidents
- Consider whether a request for information should be made or whether any information should be voluntarily provided to another ISE under the CISS or FVISS
- Consider long term intervention activities such as the need for ongoing counselling or other specialist support
- Consider the significance of anniversaries and plan commemorative activities if appropriate
- Inform any new teacher about the child's or the class's experience and possible triggers which may cause a re-emergence of symptoms
- Prepare for legal proceedings, if necessary
- Revise the school critical incident plan in light of experience gained

GUIDELINES FOR NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY



Non-Suicidal Self-injury

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is intended, self-inflicted damage to the surface of the body that causes bleeding or bruising or pain, with the expectation that the injury will lead to minor or moderate physical harm.

This is most commonly done by cutting, but also by burning, stabbing, hitting, or excessive rubbing, and sometimes by preventing previous injuries from healing. The name suggests no suicidal intent, which is either stated by the individual or can be inferred by the repeated behaviour that the person knows or has learned is not likely to result in death.

- NSSI is not a fad, phase, behavioural or developmental disorder. A young person will not necessarily 'grow out of it'.
- It is a myth that all adolescents who self-injure have an existing or emerging mental illness or personality disorder, or that they have been traumatised or sexually abused (in some cases this may be true).
- The severity of self-injury is not necessarily a direct measure of the degree of psychological pain a person is suffering.
- NSSI is associated with at least one of the following:
 - interpersonal difficulties, or negative feelings or thoughts, or general distress or self-criticism immediately prior to the self-injury
 - a difficult-to-control period of preoccupation prior to the self-injury
 - frequent thoughts about self-injuring even if not acted on.
- Self-injury can have the following functions:
 - To regulate emotions: give relief, ease tension, relieve anger
 - To express unbearable emotional pain
 - Self-preservation (as an alternative to thinking about suicide)
 - Escaping numbness, feeling something/anything
 - Punishing oneself for being 'bad'
 - Self-care (physical injury being easier to care for than emotional distress)
 - To counter feelings of depersonalisation or dissociation
 - Toughness—to see or prove they can take the pain
 - Autonomy—demonstrating they are in control
 - Sensation-seeking, pushing the limits
 - Revenge, getting back at someone
 - Peer bonding, trying to fit in with others.
- While much self-injuring takes place in private, often late at night, it happens anytime and anywhere, including at school.
- Self-injury, like suicide, can have a contagion effect.

Initial Discovery, Disclosure or Suspicion

The most likely person to first be aware of a student self-injuring is a classroom teacher, a physical education teacher, or a teacher who has a close relationship with the student. Many teachers find a student's self-injury difficult or daunting to deal with or to cope with.

Once the behaviour is observed, a calm conversation is desirable. Following are some best practice tips to guide that first conversation before the teacher suggests that the student accompany them to see the most appropriate support person.

What to do and say:

[Back to Contents](#)

- see the person, not the injuries
- be supportive but don't patronise
- talk openly (this doesn't mean in public) about self-injury with the student; not talking about it reinforces the shame and secrecy
- stay calm and respond in a caring, non-judgmental way
- listen, find out what the student needs, and don't make assumptions
- be available within limits; maintain personal boundaries
- ask for help with your own reactions.

What NOT to do:

- Don't ignore self-injuring behaviour, but don't address the behaviour in front of other students
- don't treat self-injury as a behaviour problem warranting sanctions
- don't reprimand or punish the student, don't ask them to stop, and don't condemn the behaviour
- don't tell other people without permission or without informing the student
- don't attend to their wounds, unless it is an emergency situation.
- don't feel responsible
- don't label (the student is not a 'cutter' but a person who self-injures)
- don't panic
- don't make promises you can't keep, e.g. about confidentiality or availability
- don't be effusively sympathetic
- don't focus on the injury; focus on the person's thoughts, feelings and situation preceding the injury
- don't leave the student unattended until the appropriate person is notified and able to conduct a risk assessment.

Rules

Notwithstanding all the above, the school needs clear rules for students who self-injure at school. These rules are recommended for dealing with NSSI at school:

- A student will be sent home if they self-injure at school.
- A student cannot attend class if bleeding.
- Any student who has self-injured must wear items of school uniform (e.g. long sleeved shirt) that cover recent scars, visible wounds or bandages.
- Any student bringing dangerous objects to school (e.g. razor blades, knives) will be disciplined.
- Students must attend to their own wounds unless medical attention is needed, e.g. for suturing so as not to reinforce the behaviour through demonstration of sympathy.
- Any student who self-injures, and their parents, will be informed about these rules.

Managing and Preventing Contagion

Self-injury, like suicide, can have a contagion effect, both among students who know each other, and with students who hear about the behaviour and decide to try it for various reasons. The school will use the following three management strategies:

1. Minimise communication about NSSI among peer group.
2. Manage students showing scars or wounds.
3. Work with individuals, not groups.

[Back to Contents](#)

Minimise communication

- Explain to the student that communication by any means—SMS, Facebook, conversation—can be very triggering.
- If a student deliberately and repeatedly behaves in triggering ways, disciplinary action might be necessary to reduce a contagion climate.

Manage students

- Explain to the student the triggering effect of visible wounds.
- Ask the student to cover wounds with clothing, bandana, etc.
- Bandages are not appropriate cover; they still indicate self-injury.
- If a student deliberately and repeatedly displays scars or wounds, ask parents to monitor the student's choice of clothing.

Individuals not groups

- Work with self-injuring students individually and don't use group 'therapies'.

Assessment

Assessment of student needs and next steps will require input from the appropriate person as well as from the nurse if there are wounds that require attention. The appropriate person should be a staff member with suitable experience and/or qualifications. The first step is to assess and treat any immediate wounds. This should precede any additional conversation with the student about the non-physical aspects of their NSSI.

Wound severity, implements used, location and number of scars from older wounds observed should all be noted during treatment and discussed with the designated point person or crisis team when triaging next steps. While it is uncommon for actively self-injurious students to be suicidal (NSSI is most often used to cope with emotional distress), suicide assessment is warranted if assessment deems that the student may be actively suicidal. In this case suicide assessment should occur immediately and, if detected, suicide protocols should be followed from this point.

While a self-injurious student may not be or have ever been suicidal at the point at which NSSI is detected, NSSI does serve as a warning sign for some students that suicide may become an option later.

After the physical assessment, an appropriate person should gauge the student's intention behind engaging in NSSI. Collecting basic information about a student's self-injury practices and history will be important in determining the need for parental involvement and engagement of outside resources. These questions should aim to assess:

- history
- frequency
- methods
- triggers
- psychological purpose
- disclosure, help-seeking, and support
- suicidal behaviours.

Engaging Parents and the Referral Process

Parental disclosure and student confidentiality vary depending upon school type (primary or secondary) and school policies. Despite this, the student should still be encouraged to call his or her parent(s) or guardian(s). A student's reluctance to inform parents should be handled with the utmost sensitivity. The student should be involved in the process of contacting parents. Often a meeting with the school will be scheduled to plan next steps as necessary. This meeting should include parent(s) or guardian(s), the student and an appropriate person and other required staff. One important goal of this meeting is for the staff, parents, and student to discuss how to create and maintain a supportive, appropriate environment for the student. Finally, this meeting should serve to encourage parents to seek outside counselling and support for the student and family, if necessary. A follow up to the meeting should be scheduled for 1-2 weeks after the initial meeting.

Family Violence Risk and Information Sharing

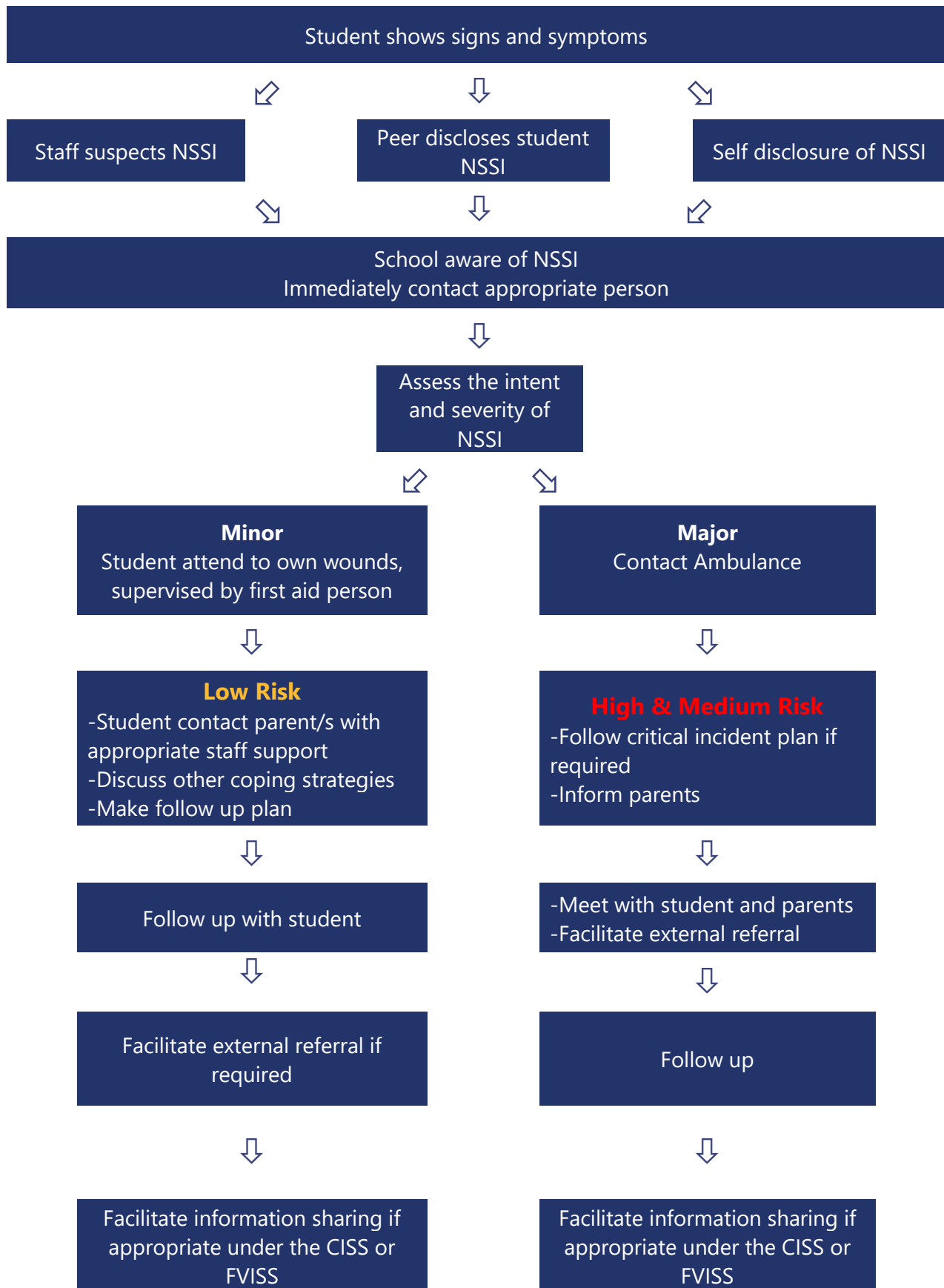
When assessing and managing self-injury, schools should consult the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework, (MARAM) which provides useful guidance to support the assessment and management of family violence risk

Schools should also consider whether a request for information should be made or whether any information should be voluntarily provided to another ISE under the CISS or FVISS. Other ISEs include Victoria Police and family violence specialist services.

Information sharing may be appropriate where this will help to promote the wellbeing and safety of a student or group of students, or where it could assist in the assessment or management of family violence risk.

For further information, see: [Information Sharing and Family Violence Reforms Contextualised Guidance](#), [Child Information Sharing Scheme Ministerial Guidelines](#), [Family Violence Information Sharing Guidelines](#), and [Family Violence Multi Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework](#)

Non-suicidal Self-injury (NSSI) Response Process



GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH SUICIDE



Guidelines for Dealing with Suicide

A student's attempted suicide or suicide is a traumatic event for any school community. This section is designed to assist school staff in responding to attempted suicide or suicide by a student and provides a checklist of the immediate and longer term steps that should be taken by school staff. These guidelines should be used to inform school critical incident plans. The guidelines do acknowledge the risk of suicide contagion and so encourages the proactive sharing of appropriate information between schools (regardless of sector), regions, mental health agencies, local social services agencies, faith organizations and school communities.

Legal Issues

Duty of Care

The Principal and school staff have a duty of care to take such measures as are reasonable in the circumstances to protect the student from risks of injury that are reasonably foreseeable. Duty of care is non-delegable and may extend beyond school hours and outside the school grounds.

In the case of a student who has displayed suicidal ideation, reasonable steps may include the following:

- a risk assessment should be conducted by an experienced mental health practitioner
- an Individual Management Plan should be developed to monitor, assess, manage, support and review the mental health of the student who has displayed suicidal ideation
- liaise with other professionals who may be providing assistance to the student e.g. psychiatrist, psychologist, medical practitioner
- facilitate information sharing with other ISEs under the CISS or FVISS, where appropriate
- ensure that any decisions or actions are taken in accordance with the requirements/principles in MARAM
- provide appropriate supports and referrals to other students and staff who may be adversely affected by the students display of suicidal ideation
- identify and manage any other students who may be at risk of suicidal ideation, attempting suicide or completing suicide
- conduct information sessions about mental health and wellbeing for the benefit of staff, students and the school community.

In the case of a student who has attempted suicide, reasonable steps may include the following:

- a risk assessment should be conducted by an experienced mental health practitioner
- an Individual Management Plan should be developed to monitor, assess, manage and review the mental health of the student who has attempted suicide
- provide appropriate supports and referrals to students and staff who may be adversely affected by the student who has attempted suicide
- identify and manage any other students who may be at risk of suicidal ideation, attempting suicide or completing suicide
- facilitate information sharing with other ISEs under the CISS or FVISS, where appropriate
- ensure that any decisions or actions are taken in accordance with the requirements/principles in MARAM
- delivery of information sessions about mental health and suicide to staff, students and the school community.

In the case of a student who has completed suicide, reasonable steps may include the following:

- identify and manage any other students who may be at risk of suicidal ideation, attempted suicide or completed suicide
- provide appropriate supports and referrals to students and staff who may be adversely affected by the suicide
- facilitate information sharing with other ISEs under the CISS or FVISS, where appropriate
- ensure that any decisions or actions are taken in accordance with the requirements/principles in MARAM.
- provide information sessions about mental health and suicide to staff, students and the school community.

Immediate Response

Immediate Response Checklist

- [Ensure the immediate safety of community members if an on-site event \(e.g. providing first aid, lock-down procedures, ambulance, police, quarantining areas or substances\)](#)
- [If not a school based event, find out the facts/circumstances as far as possible. Do not ignore rumours - investigate immediately. Confirm facts with the family and/or police](#)
- [Ensure that affected students/parents/staff are not left alone and that ongoing pastoral and spiritual support is provided document all information received and actions taken](#)
- [Convene Critical Incident Response Team \(CIRT\)](#)
- [Inform DOSCEL Secretariat and other schools which may be impacted](#)
- [Inform Canonical Administrator](#)
- [Convene initial Staff Meeting](#)
- [Convene end of first day Staff Meeting](#)

Immediate Response - If a School Based Event: Ensure the Immediate Safety of All School Staff and Students

- Ensure no other students or staff, are in immediate danger.
- Administer first aid as necessary.
- Call Emergency Services 000, or 112 if using a mobile, for medical advice, ambulance/police support.
- Alert critical incident response team for assistance.
- If the student has attempted suicide but is physically unharmed, it is important that they have a risk and mental state assessment. An experienced mental health practitioner best does this, possibly at the local emergency department, by the local mental health crisis team or by the local GP.
- Move witnesses to pre-established safe locations where they can be supported and supervised by staff/counsellors until police have taken statements or advised other actions.
- As much as possible discourage the witnesses from talking with each other about what they saw or heard until police have taken statements.
- If police are to attend and take statements from witnesses, contact the parent/guardians of the students who may be witnesses to inform them that their child has witnessed an event and the police will be attending to speak with their child.
- Isolate the site from student or unauthorised staff access by using screens, blocking corridors, using lock down procedures. Do everything possible to protect others from viewing the site without disturbing the area that the police will need to inspect. Do not remove or disturb items from the site until police have concluded their work and advised that the area is no longer a secured area.
- Depending on the means of the attempted or completed suicide, begin consideration of whether changes to the environment or access to materials is necessary.

Immediate Response – Suicide Suspicion: Find Out the Facts

- Do not ignore student, parent or staff “rumours” about suicide. Do not ignore suicide notes/emails/messages sent to staff by students. Immediate follow up should occur in both these situations. Procedures for staff to follow in the event they become aware of an incident involving a student should be documented in the Staff Handbook.
- If, after following up on notes or rumours, a student is found safe in the school, organise the guidance counsellor to meet with the student straight away to assess wellbeing and the background to the suicide concern. In most cases it will be essential to share this information with the student’s parents and refer the young person to a mental health provider if one is not already involved.
- If the student cannot be located at school, make contact with the family immediately. If parents are unaware of the student’s whereabouts and safety, the parents should contact police.
- Suicide reports made by people other than direct family members should be verified through the police, hospital staff or, with extreme sensitivity, the family.

Immediate Response - If a Suicide Report is Made or Confirmed by the Family

It is appropriate to seek the family’s feelings straight away about informing the school community of the attempted or completed suicide. If the family asks for advice, it is appropriate to talk about:

- the recommendations of these guidelines
- the damaging impact of misinformation
- the importance of parents being made aware of how best to support their own children’s grief
- the option of only naming their son/daughter to their peer group and referring anonymously to the suicide or attempt with the rest of the school population.

Immediate Response - Ensure that Affected Students, Parents and Staff are Not Left Alone

Exposure to suicide or attempted suicide is a traumatic experience. Staff, students and parents immediately affected by a suicide or attempted suicide should not be left alone but should be comforted and supported by others until family members can take over that care. Safe and secure environments where this kind of crisis support can be provided to staff and students should be identified in the school critical incident response plan.

Immediate Response - Convene Critical Incident Response Team

The Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) is a previously identified group of staff that will lead the school's response to critical incidents. New members can be added as necessary from within and outside the school and, in the case of suicides or attempted suicides, a mental health professional is an example of other assistance that could be sourced such as IT or computer staff to monitor social media.

After a suicide or attempted suicide many actions need to be coordinated in a very short space of time. However, unlike other kinds of critical incidents, suicide postvention also needs to be sustained for a period of many months. A team is essential to ensure that:

- The wellbeing of all members of the school community is monitored and protected
- all responsibilities are undertaken efficiently
- accurate and consistent advice is provided to students, staff and parents
- no single member of staff assumes the full burden of responsibility.

Once the immediate safety needs to staff and students have been met, the CIRT must meet to establish the schools postvention plan by delegating the following responsibilities:

Responsibilities List

- Liaising with family
- Identifying vulnerable students, staff and close friends for personal contact and follow up
- Preparing written information for students, staff and parents
- Securing students electronic/email accounts
- Liaising with mental health professionals
- Liaising with police
- Protecting student belongings (secure student's locker)
- Liaising with DOSCEL Secretariat
- Managing all incoming and outgoing information (including phone calls, emails, sympathy cards, newspaper notices, etc.)
- Managing media contact
- Documenting all actions
- Making appropriate environmental changes if the suicide or attempt occurred at school.

Immediate Response - Inform DOSCEL Secretariat and Other Schools which may be Impacted

Youth suicides or attempted suicides can increase the risk of harm to family members as well as other vulnerable young people. International research confirms the risk of suicide "contagion", where a vulnerable person's knowledge of, or exposure to, a suicide increases the likelihood of them viewing suicide as an option.

Based on this phenomenon it is important that schools are alerted firstly to any immediate connections between a deceased student and members of their own school community and secondly to the possible influence of suicide information being exchanged across their student population. Given the instant and global communication networks that young people utilise, schools need as much advance warning as possible so that sensitive enquiries can be made between schools and extra monitoring can be put in place for identified vulnerable students.

Immediate Response - Convene Initial Staff Meeting

Refer to [page 68](#) of this document for initial staff meeting details.

Immediate Response - Convene End of the First Day Staff Meeting

Refer to [page 68](#) of this document for end of the first day staff meeting details.

The First 24 Hours

The First 24 Hours Checklist

- [Make contact with relevant wellbeing staff and/or mental health agency](#)
- [Consider aspects specific to attempted suicide](#)
- [Identify and plan support for students who are at risk, taking into account any relevant guidance provided in MARAM](#)
- [Facilitate information sharing under the CISS or FVISS, where appropriate](#)
- [Set up a support room in the school](#)
- [Inform staff and provide script and advice documents which do not describe method of suicide](#)
- [It is especially important that office staff who may be answering phone or email queries from parents and media have been included in the planning](#)
- [Inform students via a prepared script, in small groups, not a whole school assembly](#)
- [Inform the wider community via prepared letter](#)
- [Contact DOSCEL Secretariat](#)
- [Consider whether students at other schools may be affected and contact those Principals, for example, relatives and friends of the student](#)
- [Provide classes/groups with appropriate practices to assist grief and loss such as prayers and simple rituals \(see Appendices for activities\)](#)
- [Monitor social media sites for information and misinformation](#)
- [Document all actions](#)

The First 24 Hours - Make Contact with the Relevant Mental Health Agency

Postvention collaboration between schools and mental health professionals is greatly enhanced by having a relationship or partnership already established and contact details listed in the school's emergency list (e.g. Headspace).

Having the immediate support of mental health professionals is invaluable in assisting a school to manage its postvention responsibilities. For this reason, it is sensible to invite a mental health representative to be a part of the CIRT for a period of time appropriate to the circumstances.

This will assist the long-term negotiation between the school and the mental health agency about the level of support requested and the referral process for any students who are felt to be high-risk and in need of additional counselling.

The involvement of mental health professionals means the school can share some of the work of meeting its community's needs and ensures expert advice is available to guide its actions. This is both a physical and psychological support for the whole school community.

Features of a Partnership with Mental Health Professionals

Schools ensure mental health professionals are:

- consulted on the management of individual students identified as being at risk
- kept informed of any significant changes in students who are clients of the mental health service

Mental health professionals ensure key school staff are:

- included in discussions about protective management of high risk clients
- notified when high-risk clients discontinue with the service.

Mental health professionals encourage parents and clients to:

- consent to information sharing with key school staff as a routine component of support planning
- understand that their wishes may be overridden if the client is seen to be in immediate critical danger.

The First 24 Hours- Identify and Plan Support for Students at Risk

The most important aim of postvention is to help limit and prevent harm to others. A crucial responsibility for schools is to ensure their processes of identifying, supporting, referring and monitoring vulnerable students are well understood and effective.

In the first 24 hours it is important that:

- the closest friends of the student who has completed or attempted suicide (and any other identified vulnerable students) are informed personally by appropriate staff and provided with immediate support and information about where they can receive continuing assistance at school
- the affected student's cooperation is sought in not spreading sensitive information about the deceased student and that they follow the protocols for leaving the school grounds
- direct contact is made with the parents of these students, and any others about whom staff have serious concerns, so that support at home can be planned
- direct contact is made with the principals of schools attended by siblings or known close friends, to ensure awareness
- information sharing with other ISEs is facilitated under the CISS or FVISS, where appropriate.

The First 24 Hours- Set up a Support Room for Students

The value of a support room is that it provides a safe, supervised location where students' grief and needs can be expressed, responded to and monitored. An appropriate staff member such as the psychologist, counsellor or another member of the support team who is assisting the counsellor must supervise the room at all times and, following normal protective practices, the room's door should be left ajar rather than shut. The support room should provide where possible, protection from noise, bright light or high student traffic and an ongoing record (sign in sheet) of the students who have accessed the room.

The room could be set up as a prayer space, memorial space and provided with writing and drawing materials, a memorial book, tissues, and water and can provide students with a place in which to bring in memorabilia which could be given to parents at a later date. Any items, such as letters, photos etc. should be screened by a CIRT member to ensure that they will not cause undue distress to parents.

Allow distressed students access to this room for several days after the incident. Monitor student movement to and from the support room to ensure they return to class, are collected by parents or return to the company of supportive friends if they leave during recess or lunch.

The First 24 Hours- Keep Staff Well Informed

It is vital that staff are kept informed of all available information regarding the suicide. Ideally, staff should meet at the beginning and end of the working day following the suicide. This allows for ongoing communication about decisions made by the CIRT, while also providing space for staff feedback and support. Consideration also needs to be given to provision for the class replacement of any staff member who may be especially affected, such as the student's homeroom or pastoral care teacher.

Brief staff about:

- the facts of the situation including any parent wishes about what information they want to be shared/withheld. If a death is not confirmed as suicide and/or parents have asked that the term suicide not be used, then refer to it as a student "death" at this stage
- **immediately following up all unauthorised/unexplained student absences**
- the members of the CIRT and their roles, particularly identifying a staff member to whom people should convey any new or relevant information they receive
- the response plan for the day, in particular changes to responsibilities or routines such as more staff on yard duty and interim measures to track movement
- how phone enquiries are to be managed
- the importance of **not asking students for information relating to the attempted or completed suicide** but passing on what they are told or observe
- forwarding items of student work to a nominated CIRT member (art work, assignments journals etc.) — these will be held for police and family
- the principles of postvention—to prevent further harm to others by identifying people at risk and by managing the school's responses so that attempted or completed suicide is neither glamorised nor made secret
- contact to be made with staff who were absent at that time or who are on leave.

Display relevant information about roles and special procedures in the staff room and ensure all adults who will have contact with students in the following 24 hours are briefed – regular bus drivers, sports coaches, canteen staff, school support, Out of School Hours Care staff, tutors, part time specialist teachers, relief teachers etc.

Provide staff with:

- a script to follow in informing students (sample provided in Communication Section ([p.68](#)))
- information on how to offer support, how to manage discussion about suicide, signs to watch out for and information on grief (samples and links provided in Communication Section ([p.68](#)))
- Appropriate prayers for use in pastoral care groups and class prayer
- information about the way in which students who need particular support can access it, for example provision of a support room for students and access to counselling services
- information about other staff who may be present to support the school such as DOSCEL Secretariat staff, external support agencies and additional counsellors
- sources of support they can access for themselves (see below)
- the option of not being involved in supporting students or reading the statement if they feel this will risk their own wellbeing.

Ideally, individual staff members will have been spoken to ahead of the meeting if they are considered to be particularly vulnerable for any reason. However, it is important to encourage all staff to access support or respite whenever they need it.

Ask staff about:

- which students they consider will need particular support and which students are of concern
- what they know that may be relevant—connections with other students, particular events that need to be monitored or changed, possessions of the deceased student that need to be collected for the family, etc.

All staff briefings in the postvention period should be used to both convey and seek information. This contributes to a sense of collegiality and shared responsibility, which helps protect the wellbeing of staff.

Counselling services for staff

ACCESS Employee Assistance Program:

1800 81 87 28

The First 24 Hours - Inform Students

(do not provide details of the method of suicide or attempted suicide)

If a completed suicide

The CIRT should prepare a statement for teachers to read to students (see [page 69](#)). This is an important way of supporting staff who find the task of informing students stressful. It also ensures that accurate and consistent information is provided to students, which helps counter the rumours and misinformation that inevitably arise in a crisis. Students need to look out for each other at times like these, and this statement should promote this important notion.

The issue of whether or not the student is identified by name will vary depending on the wishes of the parents, and schools should be sensitive to any parental requests regarding this. Student grapevines will eventually name a student, but in recognition of family feelings it may be more appropriate initially to name the student only to the students in the year level concerned or the class of a sibling.

Friends closest to the student

Ideally, these students will have been spoken to individually, or in small groups, by a guidance counsellor or an appropriate staff member. Depending on their responses they should be offered the opportunity to use the support room or arrangements should be made for them to be collected by their parents.

No students affected by the news should be allowed to leave the school unaccompanied, unless by direct arrangement with parents. The school should ensure that parents are made aware that best practice is that students not be left alone after receiving news about a suicide.

Students in the same year level

A modified statement should be provided to students in the same year level in recognition of their closer association with the student, their anticipated desire for more information and a different need for support.

Students in the same class as a sibling

This group will need to be given additional assistance in understanding how to support their classmate once they return to school. It may be appropriate to have the counsellor or a mental health professional speak to this group as well as the class teacher.

Home or pastoral groups, class groups or year level groups are the preferred environments in which to inform students, assuming staff are comfortable to do so.

Whole school assemblies are not recommended because student reactions are more difficult to manage and it is harder to support individuals.

If an attempted suicide

A CIRT member must liaise with the family to ascertain their feelings about communication with the school community. Depending on the level of student awareness and where the attempt took place, the CIRT will need to consider each of the student groups mentioned above. A sample script for students covering the situation of a very public suicide attempt at a school is provided on [page 70](#). However, there are many possible scenarios in this situation and schools will need to consider carefully their responsibilities to protect the wellbeing of students as well as to respect the express wishes of the family.

Schools should utilise the support and advice within DOSCEL Secretariat in managing these situations, as all options should be considered. For example, if there are conflicting needs between the broader student population and the family, it may be possible to provide appropriate, honest counselling and support for students without issuing any public written statements.

[Back to Checklist](#)

Indigenous communities

Responding to suicides in indigenous communities is a collaborative effort between a range of stakeholders, including community leaders, elders, traditional owners, spiritual leaders and other indigenous-specific and mainstream services. It is important that protocols regarding death and bereavement are respected at all times in the implementation of these postvention guidelines. Schools and the relevant CIRT member are advised to liaise with family members to determine what information can be shared and what postvention responses are considered appropriate. Appropriate grieving strategies which consider the indigenous specific issues of spirituality and ritual should be considered.

Culturally and linguistically diverse communities

Responding to a suicide in culturally and linguistic diverse (CALD) communities should include consideration of the ethno-specific background. Responses should be considered in partnership with the relevant multicultural organisation. Postvention responses in CALD communities should balance respect for cultural traditions with the need to prevent suicide contagion. The assistance of an interpreter may be required.

The First 24 Hours - Inform Parents (see [page 73](#))

The CIRT should also consider contacting the parents of affected students to inform them of the suicide and the possible impact it may have on their child. This should be done via a letter sent home with the students. Giving parents immediate and accurate information about the school's response to the suicide is supportive of students and parents. It also protects the school in a number of ways:

- limits misinformation and distress to the parent population
- reduces the number of enquiries
- encourages actions and attitudes that complement the school's postvention plan
- helps parents to take supportive and protective action with their own children
- promotes communication with the school about wellbeing concerns
- gives parents confidence in the school's capacity to return to a normal routine.

Parents may appreciate additional information and support; in particular, information on how to talk about suicide and answers to frequently asked questions and concerns. A method of checking that parents have received school communications should be considered.

The First 24 Hours- Inform the Wider Community

How you let the wider community know of the suicide will vary, depending on your school's location and its links to the local community. However, information of this nature spreads quickly, via social media and word of mouth, and can have a profound effect on young people not connected to the school. For this reason, it may be important for the CIRT to liaise with local sports groups and other agencies that involve young people. Please keep in mind that the Canonical Administrator should be informed.

The First 24 Hours - Plan Media Liaison

The first action the nominated CIRT member must take is to contact DOSCEL.

No comments should be made to the media, until advice is received.

Give one member of the CIRT the role of media liaison person. This will assist you in giving an accurate and consistent message to the media. All contact with the media should be made via this person. However, the CIRT delegate should also liaise with the relevant spokesperson at DOSCEL Secretariat.

Your media liaison person should prepare a statement that contains accurate information and is agreed to by the CIRT and/or parents. They may also refer the media to experts on youth suicide, who can give them further material. The media liaison person can reduce the risk of contagion by helping the media report on suicide in the most appropriate manner.

Research indicates a potential link between inappropriate reporting of suicides and a subsequent increase in "imitative" suicides (contagion). Any media interest in a suicide has the potential to hinder a school's postvention work so careful planning to protect against this is essential. One member of the CIRT should act as the link with DOSCEL Secretariat, as this will help accuracy and consistency of actions.

Appropriate Media Reporting	Inappropriate Media Reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Works closely with mental health authorities in presenting facts• Highlights alternatives to suicide• Includes discussion of depression and mental illness• Provides information about help lines and community resources• Publicises risk factors and warning signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gives details of the method of suicide• Uses photographs or suicide notes• Suggests simplistic explanations for the suicide• Glorifies or sensationalises the person and their suicide

Considerations Specific to Attempted Suicide

This section is not a summary of what a school needs to do in the event of an attempted suicide. The advice provided here is to alert schools to some immediate considerations that are specific to an attempted suicide. It is assumed that by now DOSCEL has been contacted, the CIRT has been convened and the mental health agency has been contacted.

Communication with Staff, Students and the Community

If the school is informed of an attempted suicide that took place away from the school or the attempt occurred without other students being aware, there is a possibility that the spread of information may be contained. If complete containment of information is a real possibility it should be discussed with the family as soon as possible. In such circumstances any communication with staff, students and parents will be on a “need to know” basis only. The student, the counsellor and/or mental health professional, the family and the school representative must determine who will be included in the “need to know” group. The major consideration in this exercise is how many individuals need to be informed in order to keep the student safe and supported in the school environment.

Complete containment is likely to be a very rare situation and the CIRT will need to have a secondary plan to follow if information about the suicide attempt begins to circulate across the school community.

If details of the attempted suicide are already known in the school population then all the advice that follows regarding communication within the school community should be carefully considered. Schools should seek advice from DOSCEL if they are unsure about their communication responsibilities.

Liaison with the Family

Critical areas for sensitive discussion with the family are

- What information is provided to which sections of the school community
- The support plan for their son/daughter to return to school
- The support for any siblings in the school
- Liaison with the counsellor and/or a mental health professional

Liaison with the Mental Health Professional

A CIRT member must take responsibility for liaising with the mental health professionals who were, are or will be supporting the student who has attempted suicide. The school guidance counsellor on the CIRT can greatly assist in this process of liaison.

It is essential that a support plan is developed and agreed to by an identified staff member (usually the counsellor), the student, the family, and the mental health professionals before the student returns to school.

Identification of and Support for Other Vulnerable Students

Schools must not underestimate the impact of an attempted suicide on other students. All of the advice that follows in these guidelines regarding support for and monitoring of identified and vulnerable students is just as important in the case of attempted suicide as it is with completed suicide.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to facilitate information sharing with other ISEs under the CISS or FVISS, to help promote student wellbeing and safety and to assist in assessing and/or managing family violence risk.

The First Week

48-72 Hours Checklist

- [Restore school to regular routine](#)
- [Liaise with bereaved/affected family](#)
- [Plan school involvement with funeral and memorials in consultation with the family](#)
- [Advise staff of all relevant actions and seek their feedback/observations during debriefing, which should occur regularly over the first few days](#)
- [Monitor students and begin assessment of identified students in collaboration with the school counsellor and/or mental health agency](#)
- [Facilitate information sharing under the CISS or FVISS, where appropriate](#)
- [Monitor staff wellbeing](#)
- [Keep parents informed via notices](#)
- [Collect or secure all deceased student belongings for the police and family](#)
- [Initiate regular meeting for critical incident response team for at least the first week or until the crisis has lessened in intensity](#)
- [Monitor provision of prayers/materials/symbols/equipment \(such as music\) for the support room](#)
- [Continue documentation of all actions](#)

The First Week - Restore School to Regular Routine

The use of the support room should reduce as time passes and schools will need to use their discretion as to when this room is “closed” and normal counselling processes resume. As far as possible (and appropriate) school routines should return to normal after three days. The return to regular daily routines and activities is an important contribution to the recovery of all affected members in the school community. Symbolic actions can assist in this process such as a prayer tree and the collection of written notes in a special box or bowl for presenting to the family or for use in a prayer service.

Returning to normal routines does not mean that vigilance and awareness of student and staff wellbeing are lessened. This must continue for a number of months and longer for particular individuals.

The First Week - Liaise with Bereaved/Affected Family

The member of the CIRT with this responsibility will have to use considerable discretion and sensitivity in managing this role. There will be great variation in the accessibility of the family during this time and their capacity or willingness to communicate. This will be influenced by many factors including:

- the relationship already established between the family and staff at the school
- the family’s cultural or religious practices in dealing with death or suicide
- the level of extended family or community support the family can draw on
- whether there are siblings attending the school.

Wherever possible, identify an extended family member or close family friend to act as a liaison if it is not possible to speak directly with the family. The main aims of this early liaison are to:

- offer the condolences of the whole school community, where appropriate
- extend the offer of all forms of support and liaison available in the school
- alert the family to anticipated or advised media contact
- determine the family’s wishes regarding school representation at a funeral/service
- meet the family’s wishes regarding support arrangements for any siblings attending the school
- plan support for a student’s return to school following a suicide attempt
- offer to keep them informed of relevant aspects of the school’s postvention plan and, if appropriate, issues that arise for students
- limit the number of times the family have to relay information about a traumatic event.

Careful consideration needs to be given to family requests. Any decisions that may have a long-term impact in the school community, such as establishing a memorial for the student, can be postponed to a later time.

If the family does not wish the death to be referred to as a suicide or attempted suicide, keep them or their liaison person informed of the information being exchanged between students. If the family is made aware that many students are discussing attempted or completed suicide they may change their mind about confirming this aspect of the incident.

The First Week - Continue to Use Opportunities to Talk About:

- the advice in these guidelines
- the damaging impact of misinformation
- the importance of parents being made aware of how best to support their own children particularly if attempted or completed suicide is being discussed within the peer group.

The First Week - Plan School Involvement with the Funeral and Memorials

In order to monitor and support students and staff, the school should know who attends the funeral and, if it occurs on a school day, ensure that students have parental consent and supervision to attend.

Ideally, attendance at a funeral should be limited to only close friends and staff and only after the wishes of the family have been sought. Appropriate arrangements should be made to support and supervise students before and after the funeral especially if they have played a role in the proceedings, for example as a pallbearer or speaker.

It is important to remember to keep the regular school routine intact as much as possible. This benefits the whole school, including those who may not have known the deceased.

Schools may appear to provide an obvious setting for a memorial or funeral service because of their connection to the community and their ability to accommodate a large crowd. However, **it is advised that whole school services not be held on school grounds**. This enables the school to focus instead on maintaining its regular schedule, structure and routine. Additionally, using a room in the school for a service can inextricably connect that space to the death, making it difficult for students to return there for regular classes or activities.

When the family holds the funeral during school hours, it is recommended that the school remain open. Students should be permitted to leave school to attend the funeral only with appropriate parental permission and supervision. Parents should be encouraged to attend the funeral with their children, so they can provide additional emotional support. It also gives parents the opportunity to open a discussion and remind their child that help is available if they or a friend need it.

The school principal and other senior school staff should attend the funeral, and also consider the possibility that extra counsellors would be beneficial. Schools should not make the arrangements to transport or be responsible for large numbers of students in these situations.

Memorials

Students and/or family members may wish to hold a memorial in the school. Generally, memorials involving whole of school or large numbers of students are not recommended.

Schools are encouraged instead to use the support room (in the first few days) as a place where reflective activities can occur with small groups of students. Later, staff may use routine prayer or assembly opportunities to acknowledge the grief felt by family and friends, particularly at the time of the funeral or an anniversary. While smaller rituals and prayer services with affected groups are important and helpful, there are instances where whole school or community services also provide a point of closure and the opportunity to symbolically farewell a community member, while affirming their ongoing memorial by the community through placement of a plaque, symbol or living memorial such as a tree. It is critical that these acknowledgements are delivered and managed in such a way as to ensure that death by suicide is not glamorising for the student population.

Being compassionate while maintaining the school's primary focus of education can be a tricky balancing act. In the case of suicide, schools must consider how to appropriately memorialise the student without increasing the risk of suicide contagion.

It is very important that schools try to treat all deaths in the same way. Having one approach for memorialising a student who died of cancer or in a car accident and a different approach for a student who died by suicide reinforces stigma and may affect the student's family and friends.

It is important to memorialise the student in a way that doesn't inadvertently glamorise or romanticise either the student or the death. Schools can do this by emphasising the connection between suicides and underlying mental health issues. These issues can cause difficulties, though they may not be apparent to others.

Wherever possible, schools should meet with the student's friends and family to work out a meaningful and safe way of acknowledging the loss.

Spontaneous Memorials

In the immediate aftermath of a suicide, it is not unusual for students to create a spontaneous memorial. For example, they may leave items like flowers, cards and poems in a place closely associated with the student (such as their locker or classroom seat). They may do the same at the site where the student died.

In these circumstances, the school must balance the students' need to grieve with making sure that death is not glamourised. In all cases, schools should have a consistent policy, so that suicide deaths are handled in the same manner as any other deaths. A combination of time limits and straightforward communication can help to restore equilibrium and avoid glamourising the death in ways that may increase the risk of contagion. Although it may be necessary in some cases to set limits for students, it is important to do so with compassion and sensitivity. For example, schools may wish to make posters and markers available so that students can gather and write messages. Set these posters up in an area that may be avoided by those who don't wish to participate. Do not put them in places like the cafeteria or at the front entrance. After a few days, the posters can be removed and offered to the family.

When a memorial is spontaneously created on school grounds, monitor it for messages that are inappropriate (hostile or inflammatory) or indicate students who may be at risk. Schools can leave such memorials in place until after the funeral (or for up to approximately five days). After this time, the tribute objects may be offered to the family.

The emptiness of the deceased student's chair can be unsettling and evocative. After the funeral (or after a few days), seat allocations may be re-arranged to create a new environment. Teachers should explain in advance that the intention is to strike a balance between showing compassion and ensuring the classroom continues to be an effective learning environment.

When a spontaneous memorial or gathering occurs off school grounds, the school's ability to exert influence is limited. However, it can encourage a responsible approach among the students. The school should explain that it is recommended that memorials be time limited (again, until after the funeral or a few days), at which point the memorial would be disassembled and the items offered to the family.

Another approach is to suggest that the students participate in a (supervised) ceremony to disassemble the memorial, during which music could be played and students could be permitted to take part of it home. The remaining items can then be offered to the family.

The First Week - Advise Staff of Relevant Actions

Regular briefings are designed to help create calm and restore order. Keeping each other informed and sharing the postvention responsibilities is a way of protecting staff and student wellbeing and demonstrating that a situation is being managed. It is also important to acknowledge the depth of emotions being experienced in the community and not to give the impression that it will be possible for everything to return to “normal” quickly. Staff, like students, can respond in very different ways and it is important to be respectful of each person’s response

Staff should be briefed regularly over the first week. The CIRTs relevant actions should be outlined and, at each meeting, staff should be invited to share any information, concerns or observations that they consider to be of importance. Briefings should be held before, after or instead of normal staff meeting business. They should not become an agenda item of normal staff business. The counsellor or an appropriate mental health representative on the CIRT should attend some or all staff briefings in the first week.

Regular Topics for All Staff Briefings

Students of concern

Staff should be provided with a handout, which describes what to look out for and respond to student behaviour

- They should discuss this information and ask questions particularly of the counsellor or mental health professional about interpretation etc.
- They should be directed to immediately pass on names of students about whom they are concerned to the CIRT member delegated with this coordination.

Activities of concern

Use staff to brainstorm all upcoming events or activities, which might need to be altered or cancelled in view of the attempted or completed suicide. Staff should think about:

- curriculum (e.g. projects, plays, research, novels that invite a focus on suicide)
- excursions or camps which may now be seen as inappropriate or too difficult to manage safely
- all the roles that a deceased student would have been playing in the near future (e.g. sporting, academic, community)
- events where a deceased student would be expected to be honoured (this is not to decide how to manage the situation immediately, just to know what has to be planned).

Further actions for the CIRT

- Plan for funeral attendance, parent consent requirements etc.
- organise the presence of additional personnel such as staff from DOSCEL Secretariat or mental health agency staff and their roles
- alert staff to when it can be expected that a deceased student’s name will be removed from the roll—this is easier for staff to cope with if it is anticipated rather than a surprise
- manage media involvement
- consider any new requirements (e.g. reporting absenteeism)
- collect information for the documentation process.

The First Week - Monitor Students and Refer for Assessments with Outside Agency

This work must occur in collaboration with the psychologist, counsellor and a mental health agency. Ideally, a psychologist or counsellor will be on the CIRT and will be helping with this work from the outset.

In the first 24 hours, the closest friends and associates of the student and any students who witnessed the suicide or attempted suicide will have been contacted and provided with immediate support.

The following information can assist to identify other students of concern and who may be at increased risk. MARAM should be consulted to assist in the identification and assessment of family violence risk. Developing a plan to support them and respond to their risk is vital.

Identify students who are immediately or already considered at risk. This may include:

- siblings of the student concerned/students with a history of suicide attempt
- students who are or have been accessing mental health services for depression/suicide ideation/self harm
- students known to be struggling with grief or trauma related to other deaths, accidents, catastrophes, family breakdown or emotional, physical or sexual abuse.

Identify other young people who may be profoundly affected by the death or suicide attempt, using staff, student, parent and family networks such as:

- friends or boyfriends/girlfriends who attend other schools (best followed up by counsellor to-counsellor communication)
- friends/acquaintances who communicated with the student in any fashion in the last hours before the suicide or attempt took place
- students who are expressing guilt about "messages" that they were given by the student but did not act on or share with an adult.

Identify other students of concern via referrals from staff, students or parents. Be mindful that:

- information sent home to parents should encourage parents and students to contact the school if they are worried about young people they know
- staff will refer students based on the guidance provided at briefings.

Develop response and support plans for all identified students, in collaboration with the counsellor or other mental health professionals. This should include:

- contact with parents (unless it is believed that such contact will place the student at further risk)
- contact with the young person
- referral to a mental health professional for suicide risk screening, if appropriate
- a documented plan of the support to be provided to the student by the school, family and mental health agency.

Facilitate information sharing with other entities under the CISS or FVISS, where this may help to:

- promote the wellbeing and safety of any student
- assess and/or manage family violence risk

Assessing suicide risk is the role of a mental health professional. However, school staff can be caring listeners and observers. If a staff member is concerned about a student's safety it is preferable to ask a question about suicide or possible self-harm rather than avoiding the topic.

Asking such a question in an appropriate way does not increase the risk of suicide and may identify students in need of help. If a staff member is concerned about a student, the role of staff is primarily referral, ensuring a student gains access to the counsellor or mental health professional, rather than exploring the issue in detail or to offer suggestions for treatment.

[Back to Checklist](#)

The First Week - Follow up Actions

Keep parents informed via notices

Ensure that parents are advised of any significant events or changes to the school's routine relating to the attempted or completed suicide. In this early stage communication may address:

- funeral arrangements and consent requirements
- advice about the wellbeing of a student who attempted suicide
- changes to previously planned activities or excursions
- availability of additional counselling services in the school
- changes to attendance/sign in/sign-out procedures, and planned building changes

Protecting a deceased student's belongings for the police and family

The collection and protection of a student's belongings is an important act of respect for a grieving family and is critical to the work that police will undertake. It is vital that students don't unwittingly distress parents or compromise police work by taking their friend's belongings or distributing them to other friends. Any items can assume a precious status for family members or be significant to police/coronial work.

In the first instance, a staff member needs to secure, where possible by padlock, the deceased student's locker so that the contents remain intact. That staff member or the principal should advise the attending police that the student's items, including pieces of work forwarded by staff, have been safely secured and where the items can be located for inspection/collection as is required in the circumstances.

Once police have cleared the items for release, a staff member should empty the student's locker (when students have been dismissed) and keep its contents together with the student's other belongings. An inventory should be made of these items and they should be stored securely in the school until collected by the family. The student's locker may need to be secured for a longer period of time to prevent it becoming a shrine. If this does occur then the flowers, photos and other items should be removed and placed in an alternative, appropriate, location.

Schools need to be prepared for the grief that parents will be experiencing. Collecting a student's belongings protects the family from having to move around the school, perhaps in a distressed state, looking for items or emptying a locker in the presence of other students. An empty locker space is a particularly distressing "symbol" of a student death for close friends so it is appropriate to forewarn them when this is going to happen.

Continue documentation of all actions

A member of the CIRT has responsibility to document the school's postvention actions. There are a variety of formats that can be followed for documentation but the main purpose is to assist the school in:

- being able to provide organised details of its postvention actions if an authorised agency seeks it; and
- having information ready to assist with the critical incident review process.

Having documentation managed by an identified CIRT member ensures actions are not "lost" and protects the school from the stress of receiving urgent information requests that cannot be answered quickly and comprehensively. A sample documentation outline is provided (see [page 88](#)).

Monitor staff wellbeing

Staff wellbeing must be monitored and responded to at regular intervals. Teachers need to be encouraged to put their own wellbeing first and to ask for respite or a change of responsibilities if necessary. The school's return to a normal routine relies on a level of positive mental health in staff and this must be promoted and protected in transparent ways.

It is not uncommon for staff to experience levels of guilt about a student's completed or attempted suicide. In hindsight it is possible to read signs in a student's behaviours that were not seen at the time to be significant. Briefings are an opportunity to acknowledge this and to encourage staff to talk with appropriate professionals about their feelings for e.g. the use of the Employee Assistance program.

The CIRT should be considering all avenues of support to assist the school in maintaining its normal routines. Additional psychologists or counsellors and student wellbeing staff in the school can help manage the load placed on counsellors and CIRT members in responding to parent, staff and student needs. All outside support personnel must be briefed on the school's critical incident response plan and must follow it.

Supervision

Access to ongoing and regular supervision is essential for psychologists, counsellors and other mental health staff who are responsible for supporting staff and students. It consists of the practitioner meeting regularly with another professional, not necessarily more senior, to discuss casework and other professional issues in a structured way.

The First Month

During the First Month Checklist

- [Monitor staff and student wellbeing](#)
- [Plan for school events of relevance \(year book photographs, award nights\) in collaboration with family](#)
- [Gather relevant information from staff for a critical incident review](#)
- [Conduct a critical incident review](#)
- [Consider offering information sessions for parent community](#)
- [Continue documentation of all actions](#)
- [Continue to liaise with other ISEs under the CISS or FVISS and facilitate information sharing, where appropriate](#)

The First Month - Continue to Monitor Staff and Student Wellbeing

This conscious and deliberate process should continue to be a focus for the CIRT. The impact of a completed or attempted student suicide will continue for as long as there are students and staff in the school who were present at the time of the incident. In the first month, the CIRT should be looking for obvious signs of staff or student distress and responding to them in the ways outlined previously and in partnership with the counsellor, student wellbeing staff and other mental health professionals.

The CIRT may consider that the needs of staff and students and the impact on CIRT members themselves warrant extra long-term support from external support services and DOSCEL. The interim appointment of an additional, experienced school leader can provide invaluable support to a school managing suicide postvention. It can relieve school leaders from the day-to-day administrative responsibilities and allow them to devote their attention to specific postvention tasks.

The school should be aware that any other crises in the school community are likely to be felt more profoundly by those who have been affected by the attempted or completed suicide. If further deaths, attempts or accidents occur it should be anticipated that many staff and students will return to their earlier levels of grief and therefore require their earlier levels of support and monitoring.

The First Month - Plan for School Events of Relevance

The CIRT may need to make decisions about planned events or documents that would have involved or represented a deceased student. Examples are yearbooks, graduation nights, and awards the student may already have been given. Schools can and should celebrate the young person's achievements in the normal way without fear that they are sensationalising the suicide.

However, very careful liaison with the family should occur regarding their wishes and these should be respected.

Each school community will approach these decisions differently but cultural and family sensitivity and awareness must guide decisions.

The First Month - Gather Relevant Information from Staff for a Critical Incident Review

Before the CIRT conducts a critical incident review it is wise to allow all staff an opportunity to contribute their views on how the school community has managed the postvention responsibilities and their perceptions of the prevailing school culture that preceded the attempted or completed suicide. The easiest way to collect candid staff opinion is to provide a written survey that can be completed anonymously if desired. A member of the CIRT should collate the responses and provide them to all staff as well as those participating in the critical incident review.

The First Month - Conduct a Critical Incident Review

The purpose of a critical incident review is to ensure that ideas for improved critical incident responses or school practices can be shared, considered and incorporated into school policy and planning. It is also an opportunity for the CIRT to acknowledge the commitment and efforts of all members of the school community and the effectiveness of its actions. Participants in the review will vary but normally it will involve all members of the CIRT.

Before the review, the CIRT must collect and provide to all participants:

- data from the staff survey (see previous paragraph)
- a summary of the documented actions to date
- a reflection prompts.

Reviews are most effective when all participants:

- have had time to consider and reflect on the above material
- have organised their thoughts ahead of time
- can share their main ideas in a single uninterrupted response (ie one at a time)
- know their ideas will not be debated during the review
- believe that the review is an opportunity to refine and improve school processes and to acknowledge the achievements of the school community.

Using reflection prompts ensures all participants have an opportunity to contribute to the same topics at the review meeting. Participants can read pre-prepared notes if they wish. All contributions should be recorded, collated and used by the school leadership to determine agreed actions, persons responsible and processes for communicating the outcomes of the review with all members in the school community, including parents. A CIRT may choose to use a facilitator for the review process.

The First Month - Consider Offering Information Sessions for the Parent Community

What parents need or want will vary hugely depending on the circumstances of an attempted or completed suicide. What is important is that the CIRT continues to consider what parents may need. The following are examples of what schools have offered parents under varying circumstances:

- general parent information sessions on recognising signs of suicide risk, current research on building resilience, understanding grief and loss, supportive parenting etc.
- year level based information sessions to address specific issues that may exist for that cohort of students (e.g. Year 12 students about to leave school or enter stressful exam periods)
- year level or general parent sessions to discuss the outcomes of the critical incident review
- information sessions for targeted parents of an identified group of at risk students.

Schools are advised to use their counsellor or mental health partners in running these sessions.

The First Month - Continue Documentation of all Actions

It is important that schools continue documentation of any decisions or actions in the postvention phase. The amount of documentation will decrease over time, and good practice would be to ensure that documentation occurs for a minimum period of 12 months.

The First Month – Continue to liaise with other ISEs

It is important that schools continue to liaise with other ISEs under the CISS or FVISS and facilitate information sharing, where this may help to promote student wellbeing and safety, or assist in assessing and/or managing family violence risk.

The Long Term

The Long Term Checklist

- [Continue support and monitoring of students and staff](#)
- [Keep parents, staff and students informed](#)
- [Plan for anniversaries, birthdays and significant events](#)
- [Implement recommendations from the critical incident review](#)
- [Include the postvention plan when inducting new staff](#)
- [Other information to consider](#)

The Long Term - Continue Support and Monitoring of Students and Staff

Students

The team of staff with direct responsibility to support students at risk will by now have an identified group of young people who will be receiving ongoing support and monitoring in partnership with mental health professionals and parents. The management of this group of students should be conducted as part of the school's ongoing and multi-layered systems of student support. The school should also continue to liaise with other ISEs and to facilitate information sharing with those entities, where this is appropriate under the CISS or FVISS.

Specific attention should be given to identified students whose social support networks may change through:

- a holiday period
- an exam period
- leaving school (transition to work, further learning or a family move).

Similarly, identified students whose family support is likely to change (e.g. through divorce, separation) should also receive increased attention.

Close friends of a deceased student can put pressure on each other by insisting on a particular way of "remembering" their friend and forgetting that people manage grief in very different ways. Staff should not underestimate the damaging impact of these sorts of disagreements between students who are already very vulnerable. Staff can help these students by reinforcing at appropriate times that there is no right way to remember or grieve the loss of a friend and that they must be kind to each other and respect their differences.

Staff

At this stage the school leadership and CIRT should consider again the need for additional personnel support in the school. This would apply particularly if the school was managing more than one critical incident. It would also be at this stage that school leaders take advice from their CIRT about whether changed roles/appointments should be offered to identified staff.

Bringing in outside help

When dealing with a young person's suicide or a possible suicide contagion, CIRT members should remain mindful of their own limitations. Too often, staff consider the wellbeing of the students at the cost of their own mental health. It is important to consider bringing in trained staff from the ACCESS Employee Assistance Program and/or local mental health centres and/or Headspace School Support to help as needed. This can often feel difficult, as these staff do not know the culture of the school. However, assistance at such a stressful time can help the staff, students and school community return to normal functioning more quickly.

Counselling for staff

Just as students are offered counselling to help them manage their grief, it is also important to consider the support needs of the staff. Senior school staff need to be aware that staff may need time off to help them cope with the emotional distress. They may also need extra support to manage their job. Staff should be made aware that they could request permission to be excused from performing some tasks that may be required of them if they do not feel able to do this (e.g. informing students, staffing the student support room). As with students, it is also important that counselling or support options be available to staff – at the time of the crisis and also longer term. See [page 47](#) in regard to the ACCESS Employee Assistance Program.

The Long Term - Keep Parents, Staff and Students Informed

The reasons for regular and relevant communication with parents, staff and students are just as important in the long term as they are in the short term. Advice about anniversaries involving the deceased student, media coverage, or any other forms of potential stress will continue to help protect the wellbeing of the school community and reinforce a consistent and supportive approach from the CIRT. Keeping people 'in the dark' about possible stressful events is not protective. It increases people's vulnerability and risk of harm.

People's desire to see something positive emerge from a tragedy like completed or attempted suicide is very strong. The results and recommendations of the critical incident review can help the community achieve some of this sense of moving forward.

The Long Term - Plan for Anniversaries and Significant Events

As with deaths from any cause, the anniversary of a death or the birthday of someone deceased are occasions that can take friends and family members back to their original levels of mourning. Being aware of and prepared for this possibility is a significant long-term postvention responsibility.

Students may wish to do something to recognise different anniversaries. Staff should try to ascertain if this is the case and assist with the arrangements wherever possible. These occasions are best handled in very small groups, with parent knowledge/consent and where an adult can be close by if not actually present. Year level or large group memorials are discouraged.

For further information regarding **memorials** please see [page 54](#)

For further information regarding **spontaneous memorials** please see [page 55](#)

A limited group of staff, students and parents may also need to be kept informed of police processes, inquests and legal proceedings. These events have the potential to create high levels of stress and again schools need to be alert and responsive to people's needs.

Yearbooks

All deaths should be treated the same way. This is the guiding principle. So if there is a history of dedicating the yearbook (or a page of the yearbook) to students who have died, that policy is equally applicable to a student who has died by suicide, provided that an adult makes final editorial decisions.

Graduation

If there is a tradition of including a tribute to deceased students who would have graduated with the class, then students who have died by suicide should also be included. For example, schools may wish to include a brief statement acknowledging and naming those students from the graduating class who have died. Final decisions about what to include in such tributes should be made by an adult.

Permanent memorials and scholarships

Some schools or communities wish to establish a permanent memorial. This can be a physical item such as a tree, bench or plaque or something commemorative, like a scholarship. Permanent memorials can prove to be upsetting reminders to students, and can therefore disrupt the school's goal of maintaining normal routines and emotional regulation for its students.

Whenever possible, it is recommended that permanent memorials be established off school grounds. Also, the school should bear in mind that once it plants a tree, puts up a plaque, installs a park bench or

establishes a named scholarship for one deceased student, it should be prepared to do so for others. This can become quite difficult to sustain over time.

Liaise with students

Some schools may resist any kind of memorialisation, for fear of glamourising suicide and risking suicide contagion. But simply prohibiting any and all memorialisation is problematic in its own right. This may be perceived as stigmatising to the student's family and friends. It can also generate intense negative reactions, which can make an already difficult situation even worse.

It is important to channel the energy and passion of the students (and the greater community) in a positive direction. It can be helpful for schools to be proactive. Suggest a meeting with the student's close friends to talk about the type and timing of any memorials. This can provide an important opportunity for the students to be heard and for the school to sensitively explain why certain activities are allowed and others are not.

The Long Term - Implement Recommendations from the Critical Incident Review

At this stage, schools should begin to plan and implement any recommendations that were agreed upon as part of the critical incident review. Seeing the results of the critical incident review being implemented helps people appreciate the positive work that the school community has undertaken.

The Long Term - Include the Postvention Plan in Staff Induction

All new staff (teaching and non-teaching) and volunteers to the school should be made aware of the school's postvention plan. In particular, teaching staff must be made familiar with relevant aspects of the school's support processes for identified students and be given very clear advice about the expectations of referral pathways. A member of the CIRT should act as the nominated staff member to whom new staff can direct queries regarding the school's postvention work.

The postvention plan should include the scheduled CIRT meetings to be convened over subsequent years until the populations of students complete their schooling.

The Long Term - Other Information to Consider

Media

The media can sometimes be interested in youth suicide, especially if there has been more than one. However, the reporting of suicide needs to be done with care, as media coverage can increase the risk of suicide contagion. It is important that only one member of the CIRT is given the role of media liaison. This will help to ensure the school gives a consistent message.

When speaking to the media, it's important to reinforce some principles about the reporting of suicide:

- Do not glamorise the victim or the suicide itself
- do not oversimplify the cause of suicide
- do not give details of the method of suicide
- do not include pictures of the death scene or distressed mourners
- always include information and phone numbers for crisis support service and local mental health services.

Refer reporters to mindframe-media.info, a very good website looking at suicide, mental health and how the media should report on these issues. The site includes:

- an overview of reporting about suicide and how to do this with the least risk of contagion
- tips and tools for how to work with the media.

Another good resource covering important issues about suicide and the media can be found at [Reporting on Suicide](#).

Social media

The term 'social media' commonly refers to websites that facilitate communication and networking between people. These include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and MySpace. Social networking can also occur via mobile phone text messaging. Messages posted on these social media platforms can have a large impact because they can quickly reach an enormous number of people. This new and evolving form of communication can cause anxiety for parents and school staff. In the emotion-charged atmosphere that follows a suicide, schools may be inclined to try to control this kind of student interaction. This is almost impossible, given that most communication takes place outside of school hours and away from the school itself. Schools can, however, utilise social media to promote suicide prevention, mental health and distribute other important information to students and the broader school community.

Involve students

Working in partnership with students can enhance the credibility and effectiveness of social media efforts. A member of the CIRT should contact friends of the deceased and work collaboratively with them.

Disseminate information

Schools may already have a website or an online presence (or page) on one or more social media sites (students can help identify others that are currently popular). These can be used to proactively communicate with students, teachers, and parents. Social media can be used to pass on information about the funeral or memorial service and give out details of where students can seek help and support (including phone numbers for Kids Helpline-1800 55 1800 and Lifeline-13 11 14). Social media can also be used to distribute other information about mental illness and suicide.

Monitor and respond

Where possible, social media sites (including the deceased's Facebook wall or personal profile pages) should be monitored for rumours, derogatory messages about the deceased and comments indicating other students who may be at risk. Respond by dispelling rumours, reinforcing the connection between mental illness and suicide and offering resources for mental health care. In some cases, the appropriate response may require notifying parents and/or local authorities about the need for security at any student gatherings.

School processes

Be aware of any school processes that may cause distress to parents and staff. For example, stop automated messages re absence to the family and reminders for school fees.

Communication - Initial Staff Meeting

This meeting is typically conducted by the Critical Incident Response Team leader, or the principal, and should be held as soon as possible (ideally before school starts in the morning).

Depending on when the death occurs, there may not be enough time to hold the meeting before students have begun to hear the news through word of mouth, text messaging or other means. If this happens, the CIRT leader should first verify the accuracy of the reports and then notify staff of the death through the school's predetermined crisis alert system (such as e-mail or calls to classroom phones). Remember that information about the cause of death should be withheld until the family has been consulted.

Goals of the initial staff meeting

- Introduce the Critical Incident Response Team members.
- Share accurate information about the death.
- Allow staff an opportunity to express their own reactions and grief. The CIRT may identify staff that may need additional support and following the meeting refer them to appropriate resources.
- Provide appropriate staff with a scripted statement to read to students informing them of the death (see [Scripts](#) on following pages). Arrange coverage for any staff who are unable to manage reading the statement.
- Prepare for student reactions and questions by discussing the issue with staff.
- Provide staff with the 'How to talk about suicide with young people' fact sheet from [Headspace](#).
- Explain plans for the day, including locations of crisis counselling rooms.
- Brief staff about identifying and referring at-risk students, as well as the need to keep records of those efforts. (See 'Identifying Risk Factors and Warning Signs for Suicide' from [Headspace](#))
- Inform staff of any outside support staff or others who will be assisting.
- Identify which CIRT member has been designated as the media spokesperson and instruct staff to refer all media inquiries to him or her.

Communication - End of the First Day Staff Meeting

It is also important for the CIRT leader and/or the principal to have an all-staff meeting at the end of the first day. This meeting provides an opportunity to take the following steps:

- offer verbal appreciation of the staff
- review the day's challenges and successes
- debrief, share experiences, express concerns and ask questions
- check in with staff to assess whether any of them need additional support (and refer accordingly)
- disseminate information regarding the death and/or funeral arrangements
- discuss plans for the next day
- remind staff of the importance of self-care.

Communication - SAMPLE SCRIPTS

A CIRT member must liaise with the family to ascertain their feelings about communication within the school community. Situations will vary and schools should seek support from DOSCEL Secretariat about this important area of postvention responsibility.

Memo/email to other school communities

Dear Principal

You and your senior leaders and counsellor/s need to be aware that there may be some information circulating amongst students related to the (attempted) suicide today of a Year ... boy/girl in a north/south/east/west suburbs Catholic school. The connections between young people are widespread and rapid and there is the chance that this incident may affect your community in some way.

Please consider the possible impact of this on vulnerable students you are currently supporting. If you need any further information, please contact.....

Script for general student population

Today/yesterday the school was given the very sad news that on ... one of our year ... students died by suicide and all of us are thinking of his/her family and friends. Some students in our school, particularly his/her friends in Year ... will find this news very difficult to understand and accept. Other students—not just close friends—are also likely to be upset perhaps because it reminds them of another sad event in their own life. Because of this, a support room has been set up in ... for any students to go to if they feel they can't be in the classroom over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times. If you wish to use the support room, ask your teacher to fill out a movement slip.

Counsellors and wellbeing staff will be available in the normal way to see students and we may have some extra counsellors in the school for a while. A notice is going home today to inform your parents about the death so they will understand if you want to talk with them today or sometime in the future. Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds, and if you are approached by anyone asking for information about this death please tell them they should speak with Ms/Mr ...

Be sensitive to people's feelings about this death, look out for each other and let a teacher or your parents know if you are worried about anything or anyone.

Script for students in the same year level

Today/yesterday the school was given the very sad news that on ... [name of student] died by suicide. This happened away from school/at his/her home. This will be a very difficult time for [name of student's] family and close friends and for all of us who knew him/her and for a while it will be difficult for some students to think about anything else. For this reason, a support room has been set up in ... for any students to go to if they feel they can't be in the classroom over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times for you to talk with if you want to. Otherwise it is a quiet place for you to retreat to if you need to. You need to ask your teacher to fill out a movement slip if you wish to use the support room.

Counsellors will be available in the normal way to see students and we may have some extra counsellors in the school for a while. A notice is going home today to inform your parents about the death so they will understand if you want to talk with them today or sometime in the future. Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds. If you are approached by anyone from outside the school asking for information about this death, please tell them they should speak with Ms/Mr ...

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. This is a time to be especially sensitive to each other's feelings and to look out for each other. Let a teacher or your parents know if you or your friends are worried about anything or anyone.

The script below has been designed for the year level cohort of a student who **attempted suicide** at school with a small number of student witnesses. A similar notice for the other year levels in the school would not necessarily name the student and neither would the notice to parents. A CIRT member must liaise with the family to ascertain their feelings about communication with the school community.

There are many possible scenarios in relation to attempted suicide and the school's CIRT should seek support from DOSCEL about this very important aspect of the postvention responsibilities.

Script for students in the same year level (for an attempted suicide)

Today/yesterday the school was involved in supporting [name of student] who attempted suicide. This will be a very difficult time for [name of student], his/her family and close friends. You are being informed so that you can be sensitive to all these people's needs. [Name of student] is being well cared for at present and if you want information about him/her please do so via [name of staff member], rather than approach any of the family members for information.

The school counsellor/s will be available in the normal way to see students and you are encouraged to talk with them if you have any concerns you want to share. You are asked to contribute to the wellbeing of everyone involved by restricting your discussions about [name of student] to your close friends, your parents, staff or counsellors. We all want to make [name of student's] return to school as supportive as possible and being sensitive about the way you discuss this incident is the best way to support him/her. A notice is going home today to inform your parents so they will understand if you want to talk with them about this information.

Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds. We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. This is a time to be especially sensitive to others' feelings and to look out for each other. Let a teacher or your parents know if you or your friends are worried about anything or anyone

Sample prayer script

Please refer to [page 99](#) in the Appendices.

Information to assist staff in talking with students following an attempted or completed suicide

Student reactions will range from confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt, sadness, curiosity and indifference. Teachers can expect tears or silence from some and excitement from others. Any students who appear to be in real distress should be accompanied to the support room or offered the opportunity to contact their parents to be collected.

Students must be allowed to talk about the incident

The first classes following the news should be conducted flexibly. Wherever possible, be guided by the students' need to talk, particularly if they are in the year level of the student concerned.

The best way to do this is to set work for those who wish to resume normal lessons but allow others to speak quietly with each other or write in a journal, or simply sit and think. Where appropriate, provide students with the following ideas during any discussions in the days that follow:

- there are always solutions to problems and there are always people to help
- suicide takes away your chance to find solutions to problems
- problems are temporary, death is permanent
- people will help for as long as it takes to feel better
- no one is ever to blame when people attempt or complete suicide
- suicide is never about just one thing
- tell an adult if you're worried about yourself or a friend.

These messages are important to get out as early as possible as some students are likely to feel inappropriately guilty or responsible for their friend's actions.

What if they want to talk about the method of suicide?

It is natural for this area of interest to be in students' minds and it is highly likely the information will eventually get out via young people's networks. However, always gently stop discussion about this when it occurs. If students find this difficult to accept, try to help them understand through the following ideas:

- discussing this very personal and upsetting aspect of a death is disrespectful to the feelings of the family and close friends
- discussion is likely to spread inaccuracies that may be harmful to others
- relatives and friends will want people to remember the good things about a young person's life
- discussing these details can be very distressing and harmful to other young people even if they do not know the student.

Remind students that the school counsellor/s are available to talk with them in more detail and that some discussions are better held in a more private environment.

Don't be judgmental, criticise, blame, do most of the talking, make promises or deviate from facts. Do allow and accept expressions of feelings, including your own.

Information to help staff identify students for referral

The following checklist is to remind staff of the kinds of behaviours that should result in a referral to the guidance counsellor/mental health professional. It is important to remember that this work is about getting professional support to the small minority of students in the school who need it.

If a student is identified for a referral, consideration should also be given to whether a request for information should also be made or whether any information should be voluntarily provided to another ISE under the CISS or FVISS, in order to promote the student's wellbeing or safety or assess and/or monitor any risk of family violence. Where appropriate, staff should consult the MARAM, which provides useful guidance to support the assessment and management of family violence risk.

"Referral" means a staff member talking with the guidance counsellor or mental health professional about their concerns – it does not mean telling or sending a student to see a counsellor without prior discussion.

Changes in academic performance	Unexplained significant drop in subject performance, unexplained absences, loss of interest and commitment
Changes in relationships with others	Friendships are lost or broken, sport or other extra-curricular commitments are dropped, chooses to be alone, engages in high risk behaviours with cars/drugs/alcohol, weapons, misconduct
Changes in mood	Demonstrates intense unhappiness, hopelessness, increased anger, irritability, tearfulness, emotional instability
Grieving a significant loss	Death of a significant person through illness/accident/suicide, family break up, relationship break up
Expressing ideas of suicide/depression	Novel/film/video choice, personal writing, art work, conversation has a focus on suicide, death and depression. Make statements suggesting they have imagined being dead and the impact this will have on others
Physical changes	Headaches, extreme weight gain or loss, fatigue/exhaustion, sleeplessness, changes in hygiene and self care standards.

Parent letter

Consent from parents must be given if the student will be named.

Dear Parent/Caregiver

I am writing to you with some sad news about a member of our school community.

One of our Year ... students, took his/her own life yesterday/today/Saturday/during the holidays. We remember especially, and pray for, his/her family and friends.

Today and over the coming weeks, you may be concerned about your child's reaction, or expressions of feelings about this unexpected loss. These reactions and feelings may be part of the grieving process.

Your child's behaviour may be different from normal. They may find it hard to concentrate and complete their schoolwork. They may be unusually quiet, or show displays of anger, or they may show very few reactions at all, particularly if they did not know him/her. Following the suicide of a friend, the normal grief reactions can be very intense, for children/ adolescents. Each person experiences and copes with grief and trauma in different ways and with different intensities.

Your child may want to share his/her feelings with you. If your child shares his/her emotions and feelings with you, try to listen and to positively support them, even though this may be uncomfortable for you. If your child prefers to talk about this situation with friends, this is normal and is more likely to occur with young people.

The school routine will continue as normally as possible. Additional professional support has been made available at the school. Your child may like to talk with a [counsellor, or class teacher or priest, or other].

Such a loss can heighten a young person's emotions. The length of grieving can vary for each person. If you have any concerns, please contact your child's class teacher or myself and we will arrange support.

In dealing with death, we need to remember the value and dignity of life. Please pray for him/her who is now at peace with God. I also ask you to remember his/her family that they will be comforted and strengthened by the love of God and the whole school/parish community.

Please feel free to contact the following staff for information about the school's support plan or if you have any concerns about your son/daughter. Contacting the nominated staff is an important way of ensuring you receive consistent and accurate information and for us to be aware of all parent concerns.

Ms on

Mr on

If visiting the school, please remember to follow our signing in process.

Yours sincerely

Principal

Different wording will need to be considered with multiple deaths or an attempted suicide. Also it is acknowledged that some of the above resources may not be available in country schools. Sample parent attachments that follow may be considered useful.

Parent letter attachment

When talking with your children remember...

Each child or adolescent's response will be unique and a wide range of reactions are possible.

Their reaction will be influenced by their personality, their past relationship with the deceased or injured person, what is happening in their life now and their ability to adjust to change.

Your child, whatever age, needs to find safe ways to express his/her feelings. They may feel confusion, anger, aggression, withdrawal, fear, guilt, denial, blame, betrayal, abandonment, hurt and sadness.

Parental understanding, reassurance and attention is very important at this time. Be guided by your child's need to talk but make it clear to them that you will be available whenever they need you.

Children and adolescents who have experienced other concerns or losses in their lives may find it harder to cope.

Children and adolescents who have experienced other concerns or losses (e.g. separation/divorce of parents, death of a relative or pet, moving house/school) may find it harder to cope.

They may become upset and need to express their feelings about these other concerns, even though they may have appeared to be coping before the event. If your son/ daughter is already using the services of a psychologist or psychiatrist for wellbeing concerns, ensure they are made aware of this event.

Children and adolescents may have many questions. They may want to know exactly what happened.

The school will have provided your son/daughter with consistent information about the incident.

Details about the way a suicide or attempted suicide occurred aren't provided to students as this information is generally considered to be potentially harmful to students' wellbeing. As parents, it is important to steer discussion towards the positive "help seeking" actions young people can take, such as talking to a trusted adult (e.g. parent, guidance counsellor, teacher, relative or friend), or using the agencies or websites listed on the following page.

"Tell an adult if you are worried about a friend."

This is an important message to share with your son/daughter in any discussion about suicide.

Adolescents sometimes share their feelings about death with friends—in conversations, letters, emails, text messages, on the Internet, etc. If young people are aware of friends who they fear may hurt themselves they should tell an adult immediately. Nothing is more important than protecting a life.

Be aware that you or your child may be affected by possible media responses to the event.

You may decide to protect against certain coverage or watch television news coverage together so that you can discuss any reactions or concerns and ensure your son/daughter feels supported. Hopefully, media reporting of specific youth suicides will not occur. However, if it does, be aware that it can contribute to young people's vulnerability.

Some adolescents may show reactions weeks/months/a year after an event.

If you are concerned about your child's reactions—for example, if there are changes to their behaviour such as their socialising or schoolwork patterns—it is important to speak to the principal or guidance counsellor at the school. This may result in a referral to one of the agencies listed in the other attachment.

Be aware that school staff will also be affected.

While everyone will be working towards normalising school routines, some staff will be managing difficult emotions. Adult counselling support is provided to all our school staff through a process outside the school.

Respond to community concern with respect.

If speaking with other members in the community, try to reinforce that the approach is to respect the bereaved/affected family, to avoid romanticising or sensationalising suicide and to encourage help seeking actions in young people—for their own wellbeing and when they have concerns about their friends.

Parent letter attachment

Where can parents and young people get more information and help?

Beyondblue: the national depression initiative, although not a counselling service, is an initiative working towards increasing awareness and understanding of depression, anxiety and related disorders throughout Australia. This site provides information about the signs and symptoms of depression, available treatments, how to get help and links to other relevant services and support groups.

www.beyondblue.org.au

Ybblue, the youth program of beyondblue, promotes the message that it's acceptable to talk about depression and encourages young people, their families and friends to look out for each other and to get help when it is needed. A set of youth fact sheets with information on a variety of topics, including how to recognise depression and how to talk about it, what services are available to help young people and how to help friends and family who may be going through a tough time can be downloaded from the site.

<https://www.youthbeyondblue.com>

Headroom4u is a youth website that has been developed to inform young people, their caregivers and service providers about positive mental health. It includes information about mental health, strategies to help young people and links to other support services. <http://www.headroom4u.com/>

Reach Out! is a web-based service that encourages young people to help themselves through tough times. The aim of the service is to improve young people's mental health and wellbeing by providing support, information and referrals in a format designed for young people. <http://au.reachout.com>

Kids Help Line (ph: 1800 55 1800) is a 24 hour telephone and online counselling service for young people in Australia under 18 years. <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

headspace is Australia's National Youth Mental Health Foundation targeting 12-25 year olds with mental health and drug and alcohol problems. Check the website for further information about their services. <https://headspace.org.au/>

eheadspace offers online and telephone mental health support to young people aged 12 to 25 and their families or friends. Young people can register at www.eheadspace.org.au or call 1800 650 890. Webchat and telephone support is available from 9am to 1am and e-mail is available 24 hours a day.

Lifeline (ph: 13 11 14) is a 24 hour telephone counselling service. Check out the website for other online information and referral services. <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Suicide Callback provides crisis counselling to people at risk of suicide, carers for someone who is suicidal and those bereaved by suicide. 1300 659 467, 24 hours/7 days

<https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/>

SuicideLine VIC provides specialist telephone counselling and information to anyone affected by suicide. (ph: 1300 651 251) 24 hours/7days. www.suicideline.org.au

Parentline is a state-wide telephone counselling, information and referral service for parents and carers with children from birth to eighteen years. (ph: 13 22 89), 8am to midnight 7 days.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)/Child and Youth Mental Health Services (CYMHS) offer assessment and treatment depending on clinical need (crisis; single session, specific assessments, ongoing case management, targeted intensive outreach case management, community based, sub-acute and acute mental health care). CAMHS are transitioning to CYMHS: 0-25 years. CAMHS/CYMHS are regionalised. www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/services/index.htm

Response Plan

Adapted from headspace 'Suicide Postvention Response Plan'

Inform

Staff	Who
Inform all staff ASAP and keep them well-informed about all available information regarding the suicide and the response plan (including staff on leave)	
Inform staff of the option of not being involved if their own wellbeing is at risk	
Inform staff of support available through Employee Assistance Program (ACCESS)	
Inform staff that the students will be notified in small groups via a script	

Parents	Who
Inform the parents of close friends and vulnerable students to ensure support at home	
Inform parents via letter/email to give them immediate and accurate information about the school's response to the suicide	
Provide parents with contact information for support for them and their children	

Students	Who
Inform close friends and vulnerable students personally and provide sources of immediate and ongoing support	
Inform students using the agreed script in small groups with consideration of: -friends closest to the students -students in the same year level -students in the same class as a sibling -home groups or year level groups preferable. Delivery at whole school assemblies is not recommended.	

Support

Staff	Who
Identify and plan support for staff at risk	
Encourage staff to contact EAP if they require additional support	
Provide staff with the details of information being provided to parents and students	
Inform staff of identified liaison person	
Check with staff at the start and end of day for wellbeing and consistent messaging	

Parents	Who
Encourage parents in the school community to access mental health services and referral pathways if needed	
Gather and protect student's belongings	
Establish a line of support with the family of the deceased student	
Determine time, location and personnel for a parent information and support session	

Students	Who
Immediately follow up unexplained absences	
Set up a student support room that is staffed with appropriate personnel	
Work collaboratively to identify and plan support for students at risk	
Monitor students and in collaboration with mental health agency begin assessments of students identified at risk.	

Manage

Media	Who
Consider the need for an appropriate media response	
Contact the, Diocese of Sale Media Advisor via School Leadership Consultant	

Social Media	Who
If social media escalates, consider intervening by making contact with the administrators	
Use social media for consistent messaging around help seeking and information sharing.	

Critical Incident Response Team	Who
Undertake self-care: -Debrief every day -Identify a self-care activity for each member -Discuss coping mechanisms -Watch for signs of vicarious trauma -Ensure that staff can take a break from response if required	

Community	Who
Inform all auxiliary adults who will have contact with students in the following 24 hrs	
Inform Principals of schools within the area, specifically those attended by the student's siblings or known close friends	
Where appropriate, inform other ISEs under the CISS or FVISS	

Other Considerations	Who
Consider who needs information on: -identifying risk factors of suicide -understanding grief responses -referral pathways to support services	
Consider whether any information should be shared with other ISEs under the CISS or FVISS	

Next Steps	Who
Document the incident and all actions undertaken	
Organise a meeting with key players to develop a plan for the foreseeable future	
Where appropriate, facilitate information sharing with other ISEs under the CISS or FVISS	



APPENDICES



APPENDICES

COMMON REACTIONS	81
Helpful Hints: Looking after Yourself	82
Common reactions to traumatic events in the pre-school	83
Common reactions to traumatic events in lower primary school	84
Common reactions to traumatic events in upper primary school	85
Common reactions to traumatic events in adolescence	86
ADMINISTRATION STAFF SUPPORT	87
RECORD KEEPING	88
RETURN TO SCHOOL SAFETY PLAN	89
LETTERS	91
Letters for use of DOSCEL for School Communities	91
Letters for use of DOSCEL for Internal Critical Incidents	92
Letters for use of Principals for the School Community	95
PRAYER RESPONSE	99
REPORTING OBLIGATIONS	112
MANAGING MEDIA	113
Social Media and the School Community	116
Removing Inappropriate Information from Social Media	117
ACTIVITIES FOR PROCESSING LOSS AND GRIEF	118
Primary School Years K-6	118
High School Years 7 - 8	120
High School Years 9 - 12	122
REFERENCES	124

Common Reactions

School personnel and others may experience strong emotional responses during an emergency. It is important for staff to constantly assess the impact of the emergency on themselves and others. It is equally important to take conscious and deliberate steps to minimise the impact of any response which is likely to reduce personal or work performance.

Staff may be affected directly by their exposure to the emergency. They may also be affected because of their close association with other staff or students who have been affected. Some staff may be directly involved in the activity to resolve the emergency, while others may be expected to re-establish and maintain school routines, leaving the direct management of emergency activity to others.

Anyone who is directly or indirectly involved in an emergency, including teachers, ancillary staff, children, families and those with helping roles may experience one or several common reactions to trauma. Many people report feeling switched on and in a state of readiness to react to a potential threat at all times. This is one of many normal trauma responses which may include:

- over reaction to minor issues
- disorganised thought processes
- sleep disturbance
- general anxiety
- anxiety
- impaired memory storage.

The reactions may be reflected in:

- a tendency for an all or nothing response
- difficulty experienced by a class teacher in concentrating and in managing the day-to-day tasks of teaching
- loss of confidence or self-esteem, difficulty in making decisions
- intrusive nightmares and thoughts about the event
- reassessment of the meaning of life goals and values
- the use of coping mechanism such as social withdrawal, alcohol, drugs, major life changes, which may in fact worsen the situation and impede recovery.

Helpful Hints: Looking after Yourself

Be prepared:

- familiarise yourself with the contents of the school's emergency plan
- learn about reactions that may be experienced by helpers in this area
- be aware that you may experience reactions similar to those of people who have directly experienced the trauma such as sadness, anger, helplessness, and anxiety.

When it happens:

- be aware that working with traumatised people can trigger memories of loss and trauma in your own life
- it's okay to say 'no' to doing specific emergency tasks. Working in this area should be voluntary
- do not get directly involved in emergency work if you do not feel able to
- use School Leadership Consultant for support.

Assist with administrative work, teaching duties, help to restore normal school routines:

- try to stay calm
- clarify your responsibilities during the emergency
- pace yourself knowing that you may be involved for days or even weeks and that emergency work can be time consuming and drain your energy
- monitor media coverage to understand how the general community and the school is reacting to the event
- ensure that confidential information about others is not discussed
- talk through your experiences with someone you trust during the emergency and use available support mechanisms to avoid becoming traumatised yourself
- if it assists, talk with a School Leadership Consultant for support.

During and following a critical incident make a conscious effort to:

- rest more than usual to counter the extra drain on your energy which working during the emergency will cause
- contact friends and increase time with people whose company you enjoy
- stay with someone for a few hours or, if possible, a few days
- maintain as normal a schedule as possible
- reduce the intake of such stimulants as tea, coffee, alcohol and chocolate, which will assist in keeping arousal levels within a manageable range
- eat well-balanced, regular meals, even if you don't feel like it—carbohydrates such as pasta may slow down arousal rates
- maintain a reasonable level of activity, including exercise routines
- use relaxation activities to assist in lowering arousal levels
- talk to trusted people, don't bottle things up
- use your support networks at home and at school
- consider talking to trauma specialists.

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

- Sleep disturbance
- Bowel and bladder difficulties
- Small ailments requiring comforting
- Acute awareness of things and events
- General arousal
- Increased jumpiness and uneasiness

IMPACT ON THINKING

- Reduced attention span
- Reduced ability to play constructively
- Active fantasy life, may replay the event and change details

BEHAVIOURAL REACTIONS

- Tearfulness
- Unwillingness to be left alone
- Aggression
- Fearfulness
- Anxiety
- Overactive behaviour/restlessness
- Apathy
- Lack of cooperation
- Irritability
- Return to younger behaviour
- Excessive concern for others
- Difficulty coping with change
- Display of awareness of events beyond age expectations, particularly in play

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

- Provide support, rest, comfort
- Provide a structured environment where the rules are clear
- Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event
- Provide time to draw and play
- Provide ongoing, consistent care
- Provide a predictable routine
- Provide security and reassurance to counter separation anxiety
- Monitor the child and note any change in temperament and behaviour

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

- Change in eating habits
- Nausea
- Sleep disturbances
- Bowel and bladder problems
- Clumsiness
- Headaches
- Small ailments requiring comforting

IMPACT ON THINKING

- Preoccupation with trauma
- Reduced attention span
- Reduced ability to play constructively
- Memory problems
- Confusion
- Seeing the event over and over
- Compensatory themes in play which may involve killing the perpetrator or creating a super hero for retribution
- Anxiety related to incomplete understanding of death

BEHAVIOURAL REACTIONS

- Tearfulness
- Unwillingness to be left alone
- Confusion
- Aggression
- Fearfulness
- Lie telling
- Anxiety
- Generalised anger
- Overactive behaviour, restlessness
- Lack of cooperation
- Irritability
- Return to younger behaviour
- Reduction in talking
- Excessive concern for others
- Difficulty coping with change
- Display of awareness beyond age expectations
- Acute awareness of things and events
- Helplessness—passive responses
- Sensitivity to media coverage

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

- Provide support, rest, comfort
- Provide a structured environment where the rules are clear
- Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event
- Provide time to draw and play
- Provide ongoing, consistent care
- Provide a predictable routine
- Provide security and reassurance to counter separation anxiety
- Monitor the child and note any change in temperament and behaviour

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

- Headaches
- Visual and perceptual problems
- Sleep disturbances
- Nausea
- Skin problems
- Reckless behaviour

IMPACT ON THINKING

- Interference with concentration and learning
- Distortion of the event
- Fear of ghosts
- Preoccupation with the traumatic event
- Impaired memory and recall
- Intrusive recollections
- Preoccupation with revenge

BEHAVIOURAL REACTIONS

- Preoccupation with own actions during the event
- Specific fears set off by reminders or when alone
- Retelling or replaying the event
- Reluctance to express feelings
- Concern about own and others safety
- Reckless, invulnerable behaviour
- Interest in parents response to the event
- Concern for parents recovery
- Reluctance to disturb parents with own anxieties
- Refusal to go to school
- Excessive concern for victims and their families
- Displaced anger, aggression
- Insecurity
- Regressive behaviour
- Failure to perform responsibilities

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

- Provide support, rest and comfort
- Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event and address the distortions
- Provide time to talk about events, fears, dreams
- Help identify traumatic reminders and anxieties and encourage children not to generalise
- Develop a supportive environment that allows the expression of anger, sadness
- Confirm that these feelings are normal
- Encourage support networks
- Identify physical sensations felt during the event
- Encourage constructive activities on behalf of injured or deceased
- Help child to retain positive memories when working through intrusive traumatic memories
- Provide a structured and predictable environment to provide a sense of security
- Monitor the child and note any changes in temperament and behaviour
- Encourage child to let significant others know about the event

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

- Headaches
- Aches and pains
- Appetite disorders
- Sleep disorders
- Skin disorders

IMPACT ON THINKING

- Recall of vivid disturbing images
- Radical attitude changes
- Memory disorders
- Poor concentration
- Cognitive distortion of the event
- Preoccupation with trauma

BEHAVIOURAL REACTIONS

- Decreased school performance
- Attention seeking
- Rebellion at school or at home
- Competition with brother or sisters
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Lack of emotion
- Need to repeatedly go over details of event
- Detachment, shame, guilt
- Fear of being labelled abnormal
- Self-consciousness about emotional responses (fear and vulnerability)
- Increase in self-destructive, accident prone behaviour (drugs, sexual)
- Life threatening re-enactment
- Premature entrance into adulthood or inhibition to leave home
- Strong identification with peers
- Mood swings
- Need to conform with peers in response to event
- Truancy

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

- Provide support, rest, comfort
- Provide realistic, age appropriate, information about the event
- Encourage discussion of the event emphasising realistic limitations of what could have been done
- Encourage peer acceptance and understanding of emotional responses
- Provide information about safe ways of relieving psychological discomfort
- Encourage postponing radical life decisions
- Link attitude changes to the impact of the event
- Acknowledge significance of event for them
- Encourage support networks
- Encourage constructive activities on part of injured or deceased
- Help to hold on to positive memories as they work through the more intrusive traumatic events
- Encourage student to let significant others know about the event

Administration Staff Support

1. Relating to Parents:

- refer directly to the Principal, **or**
- refer to relevant (designated other) staff member **or**
- give details as authorised by the Principal.

2. Dealing with the Media

- give details **only as authorised** by the Principal
- take caller contact details to be passed on to the Principal.

3. Dealing with Offers of Assistance:

- thank the caller;
- take name, address and phone number;
- note particular offer;
- note when they are available;
- pass message on to the Principal.

4. Receiving messages of condolence/flowers

- note the name of the sender/caller;
- note where they are from;
- note any message;
- note who the message is intended for.

5. Look after yourself!

Incoming Call List

Date: _____

Time	Caller's Name	Message	For

Record Keeping Template

Incident Record	
Incident details	
Date of incident	
Time of incident	
Who reported incident	
Incident location	
Who was involved in the incident	
Who witnessed the incident	

Actions			
Date	Time	Action Taken	Noted by

Incident Report	
Background to incident	
Action taken	
Conclusion	
Recommendations	

Return to School Plan

Return to School Safety Plan	
Student Name:	
Year Level:	
Pastoral Class:	
Date:	
Key School Contact:	

Background	
Clinician:	
Organisation:	
Contact:	
Treatment:	

Warning Signs	

Coping Strategies	

Interventions	
Social:	
Emotional:	
Learning:	
Safety:	
Other:	

Support people and contacts		
Name of Person	Role and Contact Number	Availability

Resources

Monitoring and Review	
Name of Person	Date of Review/Frequency

Information Sharing	
Staff:	
Students:	

Student signature: _____	Date: _____
Parent Signature _____	Date: _____
Principal's Signature (or delegate) _____	Date: _____

Letters

The following letters are for the use of DOSCEL Secretariat for school communities.

Suggested letter templates for the Director or Director's nominee	
Death of a staff member	<p>Dear [Principal/Nominee], I write to offer my condolences to you and your school community regarding the death of [staff name].</p> <p>[personalised content where appropriate]</p> <p>Please know that you are all in my thoughts and prayers.</p>
Death of a student	<p>Dear [Principal/Nominee], I write to offer my condolences to you and your school community regarding the death of [student name].</p> <p>[personalised content where appropriate]</p> <p>Please know that you are all in my thoughts and prayers.</p>
Death of a school Board Member/School Parent	<p>Dear [Principal/Nominee], I write to offer my condolences to you and your school community regarding the death of [Board Member name].</p> <p>[personalised content where appropriate]</p> <p>Please know that you are all in my thoughts and prayers.</p>
	<p>Dear [Family Member], I write to offer my condolences to you and your family regarding the recent loss of your [Relationship], [Parent name].</p> <p>Losing a close family member is always sad and difficult. [personalised content where appropriate]. I know this will be an especially difficult time for your children [children's name/s].</p> <p>Please know that you are all in my thoughts and prayers.</p>
Death of a Parish Priest	<p>Dear [Principal/Nominee], I write to offer my condolences to you and your school community regarding the death of [Parish Priest name].</p> <p>[personalised content where appropriate]</p> <p>Please know that you are all in my thoughts and prayers.</p>
Critical incident-serious accident/injury involving staff and/or students	<p>Dear [Principal/Nominee], I write to let you know that I am thinking of you and your school community regarding [name and/or incident].</p> <p>[personalised content where appropriate]</p> <p>Please know that you are all in my thoughts and prayers.</p>

The following procedures and letters are for the use DOSCEL Secretariat for internal critical incidents.

Suggested procedures for DOSCEL Secretariat staff					
	Letter	Intranet Message	Flowers	Funerals	Prayer
Death of parent, spouse, child, sibling	Deputy Directors/ Managers inform Director - Letter to staff member see letter templates below	Deputy Directors/ Managers to determine	Deputy Directors/ Managers to determine	Office representation	Prayers added to Sion House Mass
Death of current staff member	Deputy Directors/ Managers inform Director - Letter to staff member's family see letter templates below	Staff briefing and prayer	Manager to organise	Director Office staff representation	Prayers added to Sion House Mass
Serious Illness or injury of staff member	NA	Deputy Directors/ Managers to determine	Deputy Directors/ Managers to organise	NA	Prayers added to Sion House Mass
Other critical incident e.g. threat to the Office, fire....	NA	Director to determine	NA	NA	Prayers added to Sion House Mass

Suggested letter templates for the Director or Director's nominee	
Death of a staff member	<p>Dear [Staff member's family],</p> <p>I was deeply saddened to learn of 's death and I would like to express my sincere sympathy to you and your family on behalf of Diocese of Sale Catholic Education Limited. Your husband/wife/partner was highly respected by all staff alike throughout the Office. He/she was regarded as a by those who worked with him/her.</p> <p>..... 's contributions to Catholic education during his/her years of dedicated and selfless service were many and varied. He/she was a major part of our His/she contributions to this Office will not be forgotten.</p> <p>[personalised content where appropriate]</p> <p>Please accept my heartfelt condolences at this difficult time and I ask you to please pass these sentiments on to your children/family. Knowing him/her personally I am well aware of the difference he/she made in the lives of many people, both here at the Office, and in his/her private life. We will miss him/her</p> <p>Please know that you are all in my thoughts and prayers.</p>

<p>Death of a parent, spouse, child, sibling of a staff member</p>	<p>Dear [staff member's name],</p> <p>I write to offer my condolences to you and your family regarding the recent loss of your [parent, spouse, child, sibling], name.</p> <p>Losing a close family member is always sad and difficult. [personalised content where appropriate]</p> <p>Kindly let us know if there is anything that we can do to assist you as you deal with the loss of your</p> <p>Please know that you are all in my thoughts and prayers.</p> <p>With warm regards</p>
<p>Critical incident-serious illness or injury of staff member</p>	<p><i>Notification to office staff of a serious illness or injury of staff member</i></p> <p>Dear [Staff members],</p> <p>It is with deep sadness that I would like to inform everybody of 's recent car accident/illness. He/she is confined to the Intensive Care Unit of the Hospital.</p> <p>[personalised content where appropriate]</p> <p>Unfortunately, he/she will not be able to return to work for a significant amount of time. For this reason, we will be making some changes to various staff's roles to accommodate his/her workload. Thank you for your understanding and support of these changes. I also encourage everyone, especially those close to to extend your support to his/her family at this difficult time. Should anyone feel that I need further information about this situation, please do not hesitate to contact me.</p> <p>Please keep in your thoughts and prayers.</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p><i>Letter to staff member who is seriously ill or injured</i></p> <p>Dear [staff member's name]</p> <p>I am sad to hear of your illness/accident. I want you to know that you are in my prayers.</p> <p>[personalised content where appropriate]</p> <p>A number of people have already offered to help [partner's name] with the many things that must be done at times like these. He/she will have all the help he/she might need.</p> <p>Again, you are in my thoughts and prayers.</p> <p>Take care and rest well.</p>

Other critical incident e.g. threat to the Office, fire....

Dear Staff,

You may have heard that the Office recently suffered damage due to a _____. I would like to take this opportunity to reassure you that the Office is open and operating to normal routine and procedures.

INSERT ANY CHANGES TO OFFICE ROUTINE IF APPLICABLE.

It is also timely to remember that under these circumstances you may experience some stress reaction as a result of _____. Signs and symptoms that may become apparent are detailed in an attachment to this letter with advice on how to deal with the situation. If you experience continued adverse reactions, you may need to seek professional advice: for confidential support please contact Access EAP on 1800 81 87 28.

If you require any information on office routines and procedures, please contact reception.

Yours sincerely,

The following letters are for the use of principals or their nominee for the school community. These letters have five functions. They tell 1) the facts; 2) what the school has done; 3) the schools plans; 4) how their children may react; 5) how to get support

Parent letter - Death of students

Date

Dear Parents,

Yesterday two of our students were tragically killed in a road accident whilst returning from Seashell Lakes Year 11 Camp. (Name) _____ and (Name) _____ were on a bus with other Year 11 students when it went out of control on the icy road near _____ and rolled down the hill.

Several other students, teachers and the driver have been injured, but none has serious physical injuries, and all were able to go home after medical treatment.

I have visited the parents of (Name) _____ and (Name) _____ and offered them the condolences of our whole school community together with any support or help we are able to give.

We intend to hold a memorial service for (Name) _____ and (Name) _____ on Wednesday afternoon, at our school. Further details will follow.

Although your sons and daughters may be affected by the death of our students, it would be best for school routine to continue as normally as possible, and students should attend school regularly. Reactions of students will vary and may include crying, not wanting to talk (or wanting to talk), wanting to be alone, anger, lack of concentration, sleeping or eating problems. Should you or your child feel the need for professional support, please contact myself or the school counsellor (Name) _____, who will be able to advise on procedures.

A Counsellor from _____, has spoken to the Year 11 students today and will be available for you to contact if you wish. Please contact the school on _____ and ask for [insert name].

Yours sincerely

Principal

Parent letter - Death of a teacher

Date

Dear Parents,

Today we had some sad news about one of our teachers. As some of you will know Ms _____ has not been well and tragically she died yesterday.

Your child/ren may be upset and in particular those children in Ms _____'s class. We have talked with all the children and we have had trained counsellors at the school today. If your child is very upset and needs further counselling or if you would like to speak with the counsellors yourself about this matter, they will be available tomorrow at school.

Although your child may be affected by the loss of their teacher, it would be best for school routine to continue as normally as possible and children should attend school. Reactions of children will vary and may include crying, not wanting to talk, wanting to talk, anger, wanting to be alone, lack of concentration, sleeping or eating problems.

A Counsellor from _____, has spoken to the students today and will be available for you to contact if you wish. Please contact the school on _____ and ask for [insert name].

Yours sincerely

Principal

Parent letter- Death of a student

Date

Dear Parents

Last week one of our students was killed in tragic circumstances. Details have not been released but charges have been laid and a court case is pending. The school has made a floral tribute to _____ 's family and offered them the sympathy of our school community and the Year 5 children will establish a memorial.

We have been reassured by the care and concern demonstrated by students, teachers and parents in the support offered at this difficult time. Also, we have in place at school a support system which involves staff from DOSCEL Secretariat. Your child may be affected by _____ 's death in many different ways.

Reactions may include not wanting to go to school, crying, not wanting to be alone and lack of concentration. Should your child need to speak to someone, please contact me and I will make the necessary arrangements.

Though we have been saddened by this event, it would be best for school routine to continue as normally as possible and for students to attend each day.

Every effort is being made to support the children at school and I feel sure you will be doing the same at home.

Yours sincerely

Principal

Parent letter - anticipated death

Date

Dear Parents

As some of you will know _____ has not been well for some time and she died yesterday. _____ has been a wonderful support to our school. Many of you will know her from her times on canteen duty and the work she did in Ms/Mr _____ 's class taking reading each Wednesday morning.

We offer our heartfelt sympathy to her two children, *John in Prep 1 and Michaela in Year 4B, and his/her husband/wife,_____*. The school will be represented at the funeral by Ms/Mr _____ and me.

A floral tribute has also been sent.

Your child/ren may be upset, and in particular those children in Ms/Mr _____ ' class. We have talked with all the children and have had some trained counsellors at the school today. Reactions of children will vary and may include crying, asking questions about death and fear that their own parents may die.

If you or your child require further support to deal with this sadness, please contact me by telephone on _____ and feel free to talk to me at any time. Families that wish to assist _____ and the children by taking part in the Parents and Friends casserole drive can contact _____ on _____.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

[Back to Contents](#)

Parent letter - other incident

Date

Dear Parents,

You may have heard that the school recently suffered damage due to a _____. I would like to take this opportunity to reassure you that the school is open to all students and the school is operating normal routine and procedures.

INSERT ANY CHANGES TO SCHOOL ROUTINE IF APPLICABLE.

It is also timely to remember that under these circumstances your son/daughter may experience some stress reaction as a result of _____. Signs and symptoms that may become apparent in your child's behaviour are detailed in an attachment with this letter with advice on how to deal with the situation. If your child experiences continued adverse reactions, you may need to seek professional help.

If you require any information on school routine and procedures, please refer to the school's website / School Bag app / school Facebook page / phone Office staff for an update.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

Student letter - student death

Date

Dear Students,

This is a very sad time for us all at _____ School as we come to terms with the death of [insert name of student] in Year [Insert year]. This may affect us in different ways and some of these ideas may help you in the next little while:

- You may like to place some flowers for _____ under _____ Block in the designated area.
- You may like to write a personal message to _____ and place this in the area under _____ Block.
- You may like to bring a card or a personal note to school to the office so that it can be posted to _____ family.
- You may be able to offer support to _____ closest friends – not only now, but in the first few weeks of the new school year/next Term.
- Sometimes _____ friends will feel like talking. Sometimes they may simply want quiet time. You can assist them by respecting this and just being there for them.
- Sometimes it is not good to continue to talk about the same things over and over. Sometimes it is best to talk about things other than the sad times. You should feel okay to do this. This is a healthy thing to do.
- You should feel okay to have fun and to think of the good times and the fun times that you shared.
- You should know that it is good to cry. This is part of the healing process.
- Remember too, that everyone heals at different rates. We all need to be patient and understanding about this.
- Sometimes when we lose someone we love, we remember others we have lost. For some who did not know _____ well but who have lost loved ones, this may be a particularly sad time too. It may bring back memories and feelings about other things. It is important to understand this.

Experiencing grief is very normal and it may take time to work through. Sometimes people feel sad, disbelieving and angry or even numb. Good friends can really help.

If you need to talk, there will be people available at school for you to talk to.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

Prayer Response to a Critical Incident or Traumatic Event

Critical incidents can affect whole school communities as well as individual staff, students and family members. Most school communities will likely experience a significant incident at some time. A school's response to critical incidents, is crucial for staff, students and the wider school community in successfully coping with the event as well as later health and wellbeing outcomes.

Whilst the initial announcement of a critical incident is best done in a smaller classroom environment, many schools choose to then meet as a community as soon as possible on the day of the incident.

Any such gathering should be brief and allow for:

- *A communal response to the event including an acknowledgement of those who are most affected*
- *An expression of the community's grief/distress*
- *A statement of hope/encouragement in the face of distress/sadness; and*
- *Encouragement to unite as a school community in support of each other.*

(Jackson, 2012, pp.3 & 36)

If prayer and religious ritual are familiar, then in a critical incident, they help create a safe environment for support and sharing.

Use of symbol and ritual enable people to make sense of and give expression to key life experiences. (Campbell, 2004 as cited in Lavercombe 2010).

Adapted from 'Leading Prayer and Ritual in Response to Critical Incidents', Lavercombe, 2010.

This document provides a sample structure that can be used by the school community to invite a prayerful response to critical incidents.

We Gather

- It is important to set the scene for students – why we are gathering together if this has not already been previously outlined.
- The environment is important – students need to know they are gathering in prayer. This could be your usual school/classroom prayer table or a specially created space.
- It is important that the sense of prayer and occasion are met but it is also important to gather in a place where support is near at hand if needed and the environment is such that students will be able to respectfully and comfortably reflect and pray together.

If the assembly place is being used, place school candle, crucifix and Bible on a table at the front so all can see. If appropriate, a photo or other symbol could be added to the gathering space.

OR

If in classrooms, sit in the physical space you would normally sit when in prayer (if you normally sit in a circle or at tables etc.). Where appropriate, a photo or other symbol could be added to the gathering space.

OR

If your classroom or assembly space does not feel like the place to gather together quietly, you may choose to gather somewhere else that reflects appropriateness to the occasion.

OR

A place and setup that you feel is appropriate to the situation.

Teacher shares a statement to gather everyone together in prayer such as:

We gather to comfort and support one another; remembering (insert name) as we gather to hear God's word of hope. We place (insert name) in God's care and keeping as we celebrate the good news of Christ's resurrection and recall His unending love for each of us.

OR

Today we gather to pray for (insert name). Our prayers and thoughts are with them and their family at this time. May they find support, peace and comfort within their family, friends and in God, our loving creator.

OR

Write your own. Statements need to be reasonably short, reiterate the purpose of the gathering, a personal statement for or about those most affected and a statement of hope or faith for them. It should reflect the occasion, be prayerful and peaceful.

We Listen

- This is a time to share a reading to remember that we gather to share the stories of our faith through listening to the words from Scripture.
- The reading can be a passage reflecting the reason for gathering or the reading/Gospel of the week (if appropriate) or a reading that is familiar to the whole group.

A reading from Isaiah (41:6,10,13)

Each one helps the other,
saying to one another, 'Take courage!'
Do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.
For I, the Lord your God,
hold your right hand;
it is I who say to you, 'Do not fear,
I will help you.'

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

OR

A reading from Isaiah (43:1-3)

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
When you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
And the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

OR

A reading from Ecclesiastes (3:1-10)

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

OR

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians (4:13-14)

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

OR

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Philippians (1:3-11)

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

OR

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (14:1- 6)

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life'.

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

OR

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (11:28-30)

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

OR

A reading of your choice.

It is possible that the reading of the day/week may be suitable. Another option is a favourite reading of the person/s the community is praying for may perhaps be used. A reading relevant or known to the school community or with some significance to the community may also be appropriate in some situations.

We Respond

- This is a chance for the group to respond appropriately to the situation.
- Most commonly this is through Prayers of Intercession, but it can also be a (short) ritual that students and staff can participate in remembering why they are gathered.
- Usually 4 to 6 prayers are appropriate.

Prayers in Times of Natural Disasters and Terrorism

Reader: For those who have been affected by this disaster, their families and those who are caring for them. May they find comfort and peace.
Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For those in leadership, in government and authority and for all the members of our emergency services who support us at this time. May they be blessed with wisdom, courage and resilience.
Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: That creation will be restored and our land healed. Protect those who fight fires and those who care for them. Guide and bless all your people as we stand in solidarity during this time.
Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For all those who are working to help others at this time. May they be reassured of our gratitude and thanks.
Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For those who have died. God of mercy hold them gently in the palm of your hand.
Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Prayers in Times of Grief and Loss

Reader: For the gift that the life of (insert name) was for us; (his/her) friendship, joy and smile etc. (edit as appropriate).

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For courage, faith and hope in God's promises to us as we continue our journey without the physical presence of (insert name).

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For our school community: that we will always look out for each other and remind one another that each of us is precious and loved.

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For the gifts we have received from, (insert name) we pray in thanksgiving. May we remember him/her by passing on their gifts as we continue to write our own story.

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For ourselves, that we will always remember and celebrate what (insert name) meant for us.

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For our school community and the many ways in which we are made to feel safe and among friends who care for us.

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: May (insert name)'s family find hope knowing that God is abounding in kindness and compassion.

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For all of us gathered here in prayer. May God's Word continue to be our light.

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Prayers in Times of Serious Illness

Reader: For (insert name) and their family. Be a source of strength, courage and peace and continue to hold them in the palm of your hand.

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For those in the medical profession. We thank them for their dedication, compassion and care. Bless them as they continue to share their skills and expertise, especially in their care of (insert name).

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For those who are caring for (insert name). May they be reassured of our gratitude for their love, care and dedication.

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

OR

Reader: For ourselves that we can offer (insert name) our support, care and prayer.

Lord, hear us.

All: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Conclusion to the Prayer of Intercession

Reader: Loving God, we ask that you hear our prayers in this time of (insert as appropriate). Be our source of courage and hope and may our faith in Jesus sustain us and bring us all to life with you forever.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

All: *Amen.*

OR

Create your own Prayer of Intercession.

Alternatively, staff and students may be invited to participate in a short ritual such as bringing to the prayer table a significant symbol.

Teacher might invite all the community to join hands and say together the Lord's Prayer (or the Hail Mary or School Prayer).

AND/OR

As a sign of our love and support, let us offer one another a sign of peace.

We Go

- A way of bringing the prayer time to a close.
- Most often a time to pray for hope, courage and strength.
- Can include a song appropriate to the situation, or a song students all know and which means something to the school community.
- Can include a prayer or statement to close the gathering or a prayer the whole group says together.

Reader: As we leave our gathering space and journey forth together, may we find support, peace and comfort within our school and parish community. May our creator God continue watching over us with love and tenderness.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

OR

Reader: Assured and comforted by the promises of Jesus, let us go on our way with hope, courage and strength to all. And may our God go with us: God the Creator, who loves us all; Jesus our brother, who teaches us the Way; and the Spirit of Life, who is with us always.

All: Amen.

OR

Reader: Creator God, today our hearts are sad because we have had to say good-bye to someone we love. We ask that you give us strength and courage as we learn to live without the physical presence of (insert name). May they share eternal life with you.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

OR

Your own statement or prayer to signal the end of the gathering. End statements/prayers usually contain a statement of hope for the collective community in support of those in need but also for each other.

Additional Prayers:

Lord, a Friend Has Died

Today, Lord, our hearts are heavy because someone we know has died.
We don't understand it fully and find ourselves asking "Why?"
But we know that death is a part of life and not an end in itself.
We know that your promise of everlasting love offers us much help.

Death just seems so final, Lord and we'll miss the life of (insert name).
We'll miss the times we spent together – times that have come to an end.
Lift up our spirits with words of comfort, remind us of your promises, Lord.
Remind us that peace and joy await (insert name) - that this is your word, Lord.

Help us to celebrate the life and gift that our friend (insert name) has been to us,
To be thankful for the days we were able to share – for the loyalty and trust.
We give our friend (insert name) back to you today even though it is so hard to do; because God, we know
that he/she will be eternally happy with you.

(From Prayers at Your Fingertips by Barbara Ann Bretherton)

A Prayer for the Sick

Lord Jesus, for our sake you became human. You showed your love for children by taking them in your arms
and blessing them; we ask you to bless those who are ill. Your love for them is greater than ours can ever
be; therefore, we trust them to your care and keeping.

(From Prayers and Hymns for Junior Schools)

Footprints

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed He was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky
flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand. One belonging to
him and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed
that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it
happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. Lord you said that once I decided to follow
you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life
there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me.
The Lord replied, my precious, precious child, I Love you and I would never leave you! During your times of
trial and suffering when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.

(Carolyn Carty, 1963)

A Prayer of Comfort

As the rain hides the stars,
As the autumn mist hides the hills,
As the clouds veil the blue of the sky,
So the dark happenings
Hide the shining of your face from me.
Yet, if I may hold your hand in the darkness,
It is enough.
Since I know that,
Though I may stumble in my going,
You do not fall.

(Gaelic prayer, translated by Alistair Maclean; adapted)

A Prayer of Reassurance

Let nothing trouble you,
Let nothing frighten you,
Those who seek God
Shall never go wanting,
Let nothing trouble you,
Let nothing frighten you,
God alone fills us.

(Adapted by the Taize community from a Prayer by St. Teresa of Avila)

When all hope is gone, Lord,
 You are born.
When the darkness is complete,
 You come.
When things are beyond despair,
 We find you.
You roll back the stone
 And are there to greet us.
(Graham Jeffery)

Our Father,
When we are inclined to panic,
Or to act hastily,
Help us to rest in the shadow of your love.
Keep us cool and calm
In the heat of the world's busyness.
Give us the spirit of humility,
And keep us from all harshness,
Intolerance and pride.
May we gladly use our strength
To carry our neighbour's cross.
(J.H. Jowett)

God the Father, bless us;
Jesus Christ take care of us;
Holy Spirit, enlighten us all the days of our lives.
O Lord, be our defender and keeper,
Both now and forever, through all the ages.
(St Æthelwold)

God has not taken them from us.
God has hidden them in our heart
That they may be closer to ours.
(Unknown)

The light of God surrounds me
The love of God enfolds me
The power of God protects me
The presence of God watches over me
Wherever I am, God is.
(James Dillet Freeman, 1941)

Deep peace of the running wave to you,
Deep peace of the flowing air to you,
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
Deep peace of the shining stars to you,
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you, for ever.
(Source unknown - early Scottish)

Sample songs:

- 'The Deer's Cry' ('I Arise Today') – Shaun Davey (from 'The Pilgrim') A version can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqxBxZooqc>
- 'Hands' - Jewel: A version can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ik0bKfC8XSE>
- 'Circle of Life' - Elton John
- 'Come Light our Hearts' - Neil Draves - Arpaia
- 'Remember' - Josh Groban: Music by James Horner and lyrics by Cynthia Weil, *from the film soundtrack: 'Troy'*
- 'Summoned' - Love by Monica Brown and Trish Watts
- 'Let Go, Let God' - Olivia Newton John on 'Grace and Gratitude' 2006. A version can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CZ0XJqWRr4&list=RD6CZ0XJqWRr4>
- 'Gentle as Silence' - Estelle White
- 'Prayer of St Francis' ('Make Me a Channel of Your Peace') - Sebastian Temple
- 'The Galilee Song' - Frank Anderson. A version can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ab-gLmGnt7E>
- A variety of songs are available on the CD 'A Special Collection' - Monica Brown
- 'Fields of Gold' – Eva Cassidy (Songbird album) or Sting
- 'Carry You Home' – James Blunt
- 'Both Sides Now' – Joni Mitchell, *from the movie soundtrack 'Love Actually'*
- 'Calling All Angels' – K.D. Lang
- 'Don't Dream It's Over' – Crowded House
- 'Feels Like Home' – Edwina Hayes
- 'Let Her Go' – Passenger
- 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' – Music by Harold Arlen and lyrics by E.Y. Harburg.
- '100 Years' – Five for Fighting
- Any songs from Chris While and Julie Matthews – (Stages album), particularly:
 - 'Even the Desert Bears a Seed'
 - 'Starting All Over Again'
 - 'Steady Breathing'
- Any song from 'Taize' – reflective music
- 'I'll Be Always Loving You' – Trisha Watts A version can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJBRTxdLIDM>

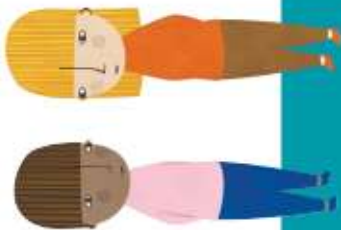
FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

PROTECT

THE EDUCATION STATE

VICTORIA
State Government | Education
and Training



YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

As a school staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children in your care.

- You **must** act by following the 4 critical actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
- You **must** use the **Responding to Suspected Child Abuse** template to keep clear and comprehensive notes.

* A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and take action.

1 RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY

If there is no risk of immediate harm go to **Action 2**.

- If a child is at immediate risk of harm you **must** ensure their safety by:
- separating alleged victims and others involved
 - administering first-aid
 - calling **000 for urgent medical and/or police assistance** to respond to immediate health or safety concerns
 - identifying a contact person at the school for future liaison with Police.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.



2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you **must** report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

Q: Where does the source of suspected abuse come from?

WITHIN THE SCHOOL

VICTORIA POLICE

You **must** report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor or volunteer to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report internally to:

- GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**
 - School Principal and/or leadership team
 - Employee Conduct Branch
 - DET Security Services Unit
- CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**
 - School Principal and/or leadership team
 - Diocesan education office
- INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**
 - School Principal and/or school chairperson

WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

You **must** report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:

- in need of protection from child abuse
- at risk of being harmed (or has been harmed) and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the child's safety, stability or development.

VICTORIA POLICE

You **must also** report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

You **must also** report internally to:

- School Principal and/or leadership team
- DET Security Services Unit

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

You **must also** report to:

- School Principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

You **must also** report to:

- School Principal and/or chairperson

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold **significant concerns** for their wellbeing you **must** still act.

This may include making a referral or seeking advice from Child FIRST (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support), or to DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police.

3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your Principal **must** consult with DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- not to contact** the parents/carer (eg. in circumstances where the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse, or the child is a mature minor and does not wish for their parent/carer to be contacted)
- to contact** the parents/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion).

4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school **must** provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include the development of a **Student Support Plan** in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements.

Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals.

You **must** follow the **Four Critical Actions** every time you become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

CONTACT

DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

AREA

North Division **1300 664 9777**

South Division **1300 655 795**

East Division **1300 360 391**

West Division (Rural) **1800 075 589**

West Division (Metro) **1300 664 9777**

AFTER HOURS

After hours, weekends, public holidays **13 12 78**

CHILD FIRST

www.dhs.vic.gov.au

VICTORIA POLICE

000 or your local police station

DET SECURITY SERVICES UNIT

(03) 9589 6266

STUDENT INCIDENT AND RECOVERY UNIT

(03) 9637 2834

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH

(03) 9637 2595

DIOCESAN OFFICE

Melbourne (03) 9287 0228

Ballarat (03) 5337 7195

Sale (03)5622 6600

Sandhurst (03) 5443 2377

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

VICTORIA

(03) 9825 7200

Managing Media

The Media – Who are they?

The media can be divided into two main sources: Electronic (television and radio) and print (newspapers and magazines). While these differ in format and deadlines, a journalist's desire to uncover a good story remains the same. Journalists are competitive – their motivation is to be first with the news.

Media interest in your school

Schools need to manage media effectively. More often than not, negative stories attract far more media attention. Media management at the school level can determine the nature and length of media coverage.

Role of DOSCEL Secretariat

DOSCEL Secretariat will work with schools who require assistance with media issues. Contact should be made as soon as the need for assistance is identified. If the Office is not made aware of an issue early enough it can sometimes impede an effective response. Please contact your School Leadership Consultant.

Media access to the school

The media is entitled to wait on a public footpath but not on school property, unless formerly invited in. They can be asked to move beyond the school gates if their presence is a distraction to students.

Being the spokesperson

As they are the first point of call, office staff must be briefed about who will take media enquiries. The principal is almost always the best person to comment in a crisis. If the enquiry is negative, do not respond immediately. Say you will call the journalist back which will give you time to gather your thoughts. Ensure that you take the following details:

- the journalist's name and number
- what the questions/queries are
- what the deadline is (i.e. the time by which they need to have an answer/comment/or statement).

Questions from the media

In general terms there are six questions:

- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- Who is responsible?
- What is the school doing about it?
- How does the school feel about the issue?

Remember, in a crisis people are looking for reassurance that the school deeply cares.

In most cases it is advisable to speak to the media as it's important to put the school's case. It looks poor if the journalist writes that a principal or spokesperson refused to comment. To the general public it sounds like the school is hiding something. That said, all the facts need to be known because if the media is given erroneous information, it can reflect badly on the school and the follow up stories can be far worse. As in most things in life, honesty is the best policy.

Stating your key messages

It is important not to start talking about the issue straight away, until you've had a chance to think about what you will say. Ascertain the facts of the issue and write down a few key messages which can be reinforced during the interview. When you do speak 'on the record', make your points clear and simple, be calm in your demeanour and re-iterate the important messages. Use the following bridging techniques to return the reporter to your key messages:

- 'The important point is'
- 'I want to examine the question from a different angle'
- 'This is not a simple issue'
- 'I think what parents want to know is this'.

What can television news programs film?

- Media cannot come onto school property without express permission.
- Media can film through the school fence from the public footpath.
- If the media film through the gate looking onto an area where students are present, they will pixelate the students' faces or film from the waist down.
- The media can interview parents as they enter and exit the school property and film their child if parental permission is given.

Communication with your school community

Organise a small team to coordinate communication with the school community. In particular, staff, students and parents need to be kept informed to reduce the chance of misinformation circulating. Organise a newsletter or special letter for each student to take home that night so parents get the school's version of events rather than what the radio, television and newspapers are reporting. Be prepared for possible follow up in the days ahead, especially in terms of school community expectations and closure of any crisis.

Principal Checklist During a Media Crisis

- Have you alerted DOSCEL Secretariat early for assistance with a response?
- Do your office staff know where to direct media enquiries?
- Do you know the facts of the case?
- Have you developed your key messages?
- Have you decided where and when you will be talking to the media?
- Have you chosen a place to conduct the interviews?
- Are you aware of the media's deadlines?
- Have you organised and briefed a small team to communicate with staff, students and parents?
- Has a newsletter been organised to go to parents explaining the situation?
- Have you prepared for possible follow up and closure of the crisis?

Social Media and the School Community

This guide offers some information to parents and caregivers about how to use social media in relation to comments or posts about their school community

The internet, mobile phones and social media provide wonderful opportunities for you to network and socialise online. While these technologies provide positive platforms for sharing ideas, they also have the potential to cause pain and suffering to individuals, groups or even whole communities. Just as you would discourage your child from behaving inappropriately online, it's important to remember that sometimes negative comments that parents and caregivers post about their school community have a greater impact than expected.

General Tips

Being aware of a few simple strategies can help keep the use of social media positive and constructive:

- Before you post something online, ask yourself if the community or individual really need to know. Is it relevant, positive and helpful?
- Remember that what you post online is a direct reflection of who you are. People will potentially form lasting opinions of you based on what you post online.
- Be a good role model. If things get heated online consider logging out and taking a few moments to relax and think. Hasty, emotive responses could inflame situations unnecessarily.
- Be mindful when commenting, try to keep general and avoid posting anything that could identify individuals.
- A few years ago parents may have discussed concerns or issues with their friends at the school gate. Today with the use of social media, online discussions between you and your close friends can very quickly be shared with a much wider audience, potentially far larger than intended.
- Taking a few moments to think about the content you are about to post could save upset, embarrassment, and possible legal action.
- As a parent you have a role in supervising and regulating your child's online activities at home and its impact on the reputation and privacy of others. Parents are their child's first teachers — so they will learn online behaviours from you.

Is it appropriate to comment or post about schools, staff or students?

- Parental and community feedback is important for schools and the department. If you have a compliment, complaint or enquiry about an issue at school, the best approach is to speak directly to the school about the matter, rather than discussing it in a public forum.
- While many schools use social media to update parents of school notices, parents should contact schools directly with a compliment, complaint or enquiry due to privacy considerations. Imagine if your doctor, accountant or bank tried to contact you to discuss important matters via Facebook.
- If you have raised an issue with a school or know that another person has, consider refraining from discussing those details on social media, particularly the names of anyone involved.
- Keep comments calm and polite, just as you would over the telephone or by email.
- If you encounter negative or derogatory content online which involves the school, hinders a child's learning and/or affects the school community at large, contact the school principal.

What about other people's privacy?

If you upload photos of your children, be mindful of who might be in the background. You might be happy to share your child's successes with your friends and family via social media, but some parents are not. If you are tagging or naming students, consider that other parents may not want their child's name attached to images online.

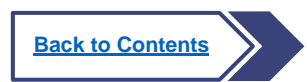
What if I encounter problem content?

Taking the following steps may help resolve the issue in a constructive way:

- refrain from responding
- take a screen capture or print a copy of the concerning online content
- if you consider problem content to be explicit, pornographic or exploitative of minors, you should keep a record of the URL of the page containing that content but NOT print or share it. The URL can be provided to authorities as needed for escalation of serious concerns
- block the offending user
- report the content to the social media provider.

How do I report inappropriate content?

Social media providers may remove content that contravenes their terms of service and/or acceptable use policies. Most websites and apps have a 'report/block this person' or 'report/flag content' function.



Removing Inappropriate Content from Social Media

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Monitor Social Media	Communicate	Identify Inappropriate Content	Remove Content	Contact the Authorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media sites should be monitored for rumours, derogatory messages and comments. Respond by dispelling rumours and offering resources for relevant support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactively communicate with students, teachers, and parents about the facts if appropriate. Provide details of support (including phone numbers for Kids Helpline and Lifeline). Be aware of any school processes that may cause distress. E.g. Automated messages re absence to the family and reminders for school fees. 	<p>Inappropriate content includes but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Words or images that personally attack, humiliate or defame an individual. Content that threatens, discriminates, harasses, menaces or causes offence including stalking. A fake profile of an individual or school. Depictions of nudity, pornography or child abuse. Depictions of excessive violence. Content that is illegal, gives instructions for illegal activity or advocates terrorist activities. <p>Sites may take a differing view on whether the content is appropriate or not. Many support freedom of expression and so content must specifically breach their terms of use or the law</p>	<p>If you know the <u>person responsible</u> for the content, then ask that person to remove the content. You could highlight that posts may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cause unnecessary distress for others Provide inaccurate information Compromising a person's right to privacy <p>If the person is <u>unknown</u>, cannot be contacted or refuses to remove the content then check the Terms and Conditions</p> <p>Terms and Conditions Most websites where users can post their own content have procedures for removing inappropriate content. Often these websites rely on users 'reporting' inappropriate content to their site administrator. If you are unsure how to report content, check the website's terms and conditions.</p> <p>Facebook</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If someone has posted an inappropriate post, report this to Facebook using the "Report Story or Spam" link beside the post. If they have created an offensive page, report it by going to the page and using the "Report Page" link at the bottom of the left hand column. If they have created an offensive group, report it by going to the group and using the "Report Group" link at the bottom of the page. If they have created a fake profile which imitates a real person, go to the profile and click "Report/Block This Person" at bottom of the left column then click "This profile is pretending to be someone or is fake" <p>Twitter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If someone has posted something inappropriate on Twitter that violates the Twitter Rules and Terms of Service report it by visiting their support centre (https://support.twitter.com) and filing a support ticket. <p>YouTube</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If someone has posted an inappropriate video, and you have an account, report it to YouTube by selecting the "Flag" button under it and selecting the reason for reporting it. If you don't have an account you may have to sign up for one first or seek help from someone else who has an account. 	<p>If you believe that the content may be ILLEGAL or prohibited, report it to the following authorities.</p> <p>Australian Communications and Media Authority If you have found something OFFENSIVE online and/or potentially prohibited content online and the website will not remove it, report it via the ACMA hotline at: www.acma.gov.au</p> <p>Victoria Police If you believe that the posting of the content constitutes CRIMINAL activity, report it to your local police station.</p>

Other websites

- If a person is posting inappropriate content which violates a website's Terms of Use, click on the "Contact", "Help" or Safety" options available on most websites (often in the footer). This section should outline a procedure for dealing with such content or allow you to contact the website's administration team.

Activities for Processing Loss and Grief

PRIMARY SCHOOL YEARS K-6

Letters of regret and appreciation

This is an opportunity for youth to process their "unfinished business" by getting clear about anything which is fostering feelings of guilt as well as helping them begin to get in touch with the wonderful things about that person that they will miss.

Planning of the memorial activity

This can be something that happens either in or out of the safe room environment. That should be determined independently with each crisis. There could be one person from the building assigned to coordinate the memorial activity efforts. Students need to be aware of how they can be involved in this.

Feelings list

Students generate a list of feelings that are written on the board. Make a second list of what we can "do" or how to express those feelings. For example, "I could go out and beat the ground or rip newspapers." (If a student responds with, "I can pretend I don't have feelings," ask, "What happens then? What happens to those feelings and what is the result of pretending? What will happen the next time someone you love dies?") Don't expect immediate resolution of grief issues. In this type of discussion, you can also point out that it is an opportunity to make choices about how we solve our problems and how we will share serious feelings. This may be a new experience for many students.

Create a mural

Put up huge pieces of newsprint roll or butcher paper on the walls and let the students create a mural of their thoughts and feelings.

Having specific outside people available to talk

Sometimes because of the uniqueness of an event, it may be helpful to have a specific person come in to process this event with some of the students. That might be having a nurse come in who can describe material facts about a particular death or illness, or having a paramedic come in who was at the scene to help dispel rumours.

Drawing happy memories of the person

This internalises that the love doesn't die.

Think of Analogies

Think of analogies that makes sense to the developmental age of the students and encourage them to draw pictures which represent grief, loss or sadness. Examples of this might be "Every time someone dies it is as though we have a bucket of tears inside us. Draw yourself and the bucket inside you. How high up is the level of the tears?" or "If sadness were an animal, what would it look like?" or "If we could do all of our grieving on a special island, what would that island have on it? Draw your boat on the journey to the island.

Do lifelines

Hang a huge long piece of butcher paper on the wall, and invite the students to draw a long line representing their lives, and let each one note significant life events, both "good and bad" (or happy and difficult) along the line. Help them see what balance you can find in their lives, and similar experiences between students.

Create a "question wall"

Students write their life questions on paper and place them on a special wall designated as the "Question Wall." Then ask the question of the group. As questions are answered or discussed through group dialogue or activity, remove the question and replace it with a new one. Questions that might arise include: What is the meaning of life? The meaning of death? What is nature? Who or what is part of nature? Why do we die? Why is there pain and suffering? Why do some die young? Is there meaning to the cycle of life and dying?

Create a treasure box, a memory book or some other means of saving or keeping the memories of a loved one alive after a death

The treasure box could be decorated or could be just a special box, but it is a place to put special things that belonged to that person. Or it could be a place to keep writings and pictures of him/her. The memory book could be something the child writes in or could be something that is passed around to many who knew the person who died. Many people could put their memories down so the child has these for later years.

Having specific outside people available to talk

Sometimes because of the uniqueness of an event, it may be helpful to have a specific person come in to process this event with some of the students, that might be having a nurse come in who can describe material facts about a particular death or illness, or having a paramedic or police officer come in who was at the scene to help dispel rumours.

HIGH SCHOOL YEARS 7-8

The primary focus of the Support Room is to give students an opportunity to process, vent, and to integrate the meaning of the loss for themselves, usually primarily through talking in small groups with trained staff members. Additionally, these activities might be helpful.

Cards and letters to the family/Memory Book

This is a wonderful means for youth to share their sympathy with the family. Encourage them to share a happy memory about the deceased either in words or by drawing a picture. Or suggest they share the attributes they most appreciated in their friend. These must be screened by an adult to be certain that what goes out to the family is appropriate. Often art activities are times when students are therapeutically working on making the event real, or coming to terms with some of the frightening or gory details. If a student does a card for the family that is graphic in this regard and might be hurtful to receive, explain the positive function of being able to draw about the scary parts and give the student lots of positive reinforcement for their willingness to confront this part for themselves. Then gently encourage them to think of a second "theme" to use and make another card especially for the family. The student might want to take their first picture home to share with parents, and if this is so, it might be helpful for someone to give a call to the parents to help them understand the context of how this came to be drawn. Getting these things out of context can be very upsetting to parents.

Create a memory bulletin board

A special bulletin board in a central location that is accessible to all students (like in the main hallway or the front office) can be designated as a place for students to display special pictures or poems they write about this tragedy. Screen contributions for appropriateness before posting.

Give it all a story

This series of three pictures can be very helpful. Let students begin by drawing what life was like before this happened, and then another picture of what happened/how they were hurt/bothered, etc. Then have them draw how it will be once they have reconciled their grief and feel happiness again. The last picture is one of what will need to happen for them to make that shift or change.

Create a treasure box, a memory book or some other means of saving or keeping the memories of a loved one alive after a death

The treasure box could be decorated or could be just a special box, but it is a place to put special things that belonged to that person. Or it could be a place to keep writings and pictures of him/her. The memory book could be something the child writes in or could be something that is passed around to many who knew the person who died. Many people could put their memories down so the child has these for later years.

Art supplies and butcher paper or poster paper

Often students want to make a giant poster that expresses their loss. This is something a whole group can do.

Letters of regret and appreciation

This is an opportunity for youth to process their "unfinished business" by getting clear about anything that is fostering feelings of guilt as well as helping them begin to get in touch with the wonderful things about that person that they will miss.

Planning of the memorial activity

This can be something that happens either in or out of the safe room environment. That should be determined independently with each crisis. There could be one person from the building assigned to coordinate the memorial activity efforts. Students need to be aware of how they can be involved in this.

Feelings list

Students generate a list of feelings that are written on the board. Make a second list of what we can "do" or how to express those feelings. For example, "I could go out and beat the ground or rip newspapers." (If a student responds with, "I can pretend I don't have feelings," ask, "What happens then? What happens to those feelings and what is the result of pretending? What will happen the next time someone you love dies?") Don't expect immediate resolution of grief issues. In this type of discussion, you can also point out that it is an opportunity to make choices about how we solve our problems and how we will share serious feelings. This may be a new experience for many students.

Create a mural

Put up huge pieces of newsprint roll or butcher paper on the walls and let the students create a mural of their thoughts and feelings.

Having specific outside people available to talk

Sometimes because of the uniqueness of an event, it may be helpful to have a specific person come in to process this event with some of the students. That might be having a nurse come in who can describe material facts about a particular death or illness, or having a paramedic come in who was at the scene to help dispel rumours.

Drawing happy memories of the person

This internalises that the love doesn't die.

Think of Analogies

Think of analogies that make sense to the developmental age of the students and encourage them to draw pictures which represent grief, loss or sadness. Examples of this might be "Every time someone dies it is as though we have a bucket of tears inside us. Draw yourself and the bucket inside you. How high up is the level of the tears?" or "If sadness were an animal, what would it look like?" or "If we could do all of our grieving on a special island, what would that island have on it? Draw your boat on the journey to the island."

Do lifelines

Hang a huge long piece of butcher paper on the wall, and invite the students to draw a long line representing their lives, and let each one note significant life events, both "good and bad" (or happy and difficult) along the line. Help them see what balance you can find in their lives, and similar experiences between students.

Create a "question wall"

Students write their life questions on paper and place them on a special wall designated as the "Question Wall." Then ask the question of the group. As questions are answered or discussed through group dialogue or activity, remove the question and replace it with a new one. Questions that might arise include: What is the meaning of life? The meaning of death? What is nature? Who or what is part of nature? Why do we die? Why is there pain and suffering? Why do some die young? Is there meaning to the cycle of life and dying?

HIGH SCHOOL YEARS 9-12

The primary focus of the student support room is to give students an opportunity to process, vent, and to integrate the meaning of the loss for themselves, usually primarily through talking in small groups with trained staff members. Additionally, these activities might be helpful.

Letters of regret and appreciation

This is an opportunity for youth to process their "unfinished business" by getting clear about anything that is fostering feelings of guilt as well as helping them begin to get in touch with the wonderful things about that person that they will miss.

Cards and letters to the family/Memory Book

This is a wonderful means for youth to share their sympathy with the family. Encourage them to share a happy memory about the deceased either in words or by drawing a picture. Or suggest they share the attributes they most appreciated in their friend. These must be screened by an adult to be certain that what goes out to the family is appropriate. Often art activities are times when students are therapeutically working on making the event real, or coming to terms with some of the frightening or gory details. If a student does a card for the family that is graphic in this regard and might be hurtful to receive, explain the positive function of being able to draw about the scary parts and give the student lots of positive reinforcement for their willingness to confront this part for themselves. Then gently encourage them to think of a second "theme" to use and make another card especially for the family. The student might want to take their first picture home to share with parents, and if this is so, it might be helpful for someone to give a call to the parents to help them understand the context of how this came to be drawn. Getting these things out of context can be very upsetting to parents.

Art supplies and butcher paper or poster paper

Often students want to make a giant poster that expresses their loss. This is something a whole group can do.

Planning of the memorial activity

This can be something that happens either in or out of the safe room environment. That should be determined independently with each crisis. There could be one person from the building assigned to coordinate the memorial activity efforts. Students need to be aware of how they can be involved in this.

Having specific outside people available to talk

Sometimes because of the uniqueness of an event, it may be helpful to have a specific person come in to process this event with some of the students. That might be having a nurse come in who can describe material facts about a particular death or illness, or having a paramedic come in who was at the scene to help dispel rumours.

Drawing happy memories of the person

This internalises that the love doesn't die.

Think of Analogies

Think of analogies that make sense to the developmental age of the students and encourage them to draw pictures that represent grief, loss or sadness. Examples of this might be "Every time someone dies it is as though we have a bucket of tears inside us. Draw yourself and the bucket inside you. How high up is the level of the tears?" or "If sadness were an animal, what would it look like?" or "If we could do all of our grieving on a special island, what would that island have on it? Draw your boat on the journey to the island."

Do lifelines

Hang a huge long piece of butcher paper on the wall, and invite the students to draw a long line representing their lives, and let each one note significant life events, both "good and bad" (or happy and difficult) along the line. Help them see what balance you can find in their lives, and similar experiences between students.

Create a "question wall"

Students write their life questions-on paper and place them on a special wall designated as the "Question Wall." Then ask the question of the group. As questions are answered or discussed through group dialogue or activity, remove the question and replace it with a new one. Questions that might arise include: What is the meaning of life? The meaning of death? What is nature? Who or what is part of nature? Why do we die? Why is there pain and suffering? Why do some die young? Is there meaning to the cycle of life and dying?

Wise Board

On the chalkboard, put quotes, topics, questions related to their grief experience and tell students they are free to express their feelings through art. Use crayons, paints, coloured paper, magazines, scissors, musical sheets, glue, etc.

Create a mural

Put up huge pieces of newsprint roll or butcher paper on the walls and let the students create a mural of their thoughts and feelings.

Create a memory bulletin board

A special bulletin board in a central location that is accessible to all students (like in the main hallway or the front office) can be designated as a place for students to display special pictures or poems they write about this tragedy. Screen contributions for appropriateness before posting.

Create a treasure box, a memory book or some other means of saving or keeping the memories of a loved one alive after a death

The treasure box could be decorated or could be just a special box, but it is a place to put special things that belonged to that person. Or it could be a place to keep writings and pictures of him/her. The memory book could be something the child writes in or could be something that is passed around to many who knew the person who died. Many people could put their memories down so the child has these for later years.

References

Jackson, C (2012). *Towards Healing and Stability after Distressing Events: Critical Incident Management Guidelines for Schools*, Devonport, Tasmania; Sisters of Charity Outreach.

Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, (1997). *Managing School Emergencies: Minimising the impact of trauma on staff and students*. Melbourne; Author

DET (2016). *Protect: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools*. http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/protect/ChildSafeStandard5_SchoolsGuide.pdf

Brisbane Catholic Education. (2012). *Suicide Postvention Guidelines*, Brisbane; Author

Headspace (2012). *Suicide Postvention Toolkit: A guide for secondary schools*. Melbourne, Australia; Author

South Australia Department of Education and Children's Services, Catholic Education South Australia and Association of Independent Schools. (2010). *Suicide Postvention Guidelines: A framework to assist staff in supporting their school communities in responding to suspected, attempted or completed suicide*. South Australia: Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Children's Services.

CISS, FVISS and MARAM

- [Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 \(Vic.\)](#)
- [Child Wellbeing and Safety \(Information Sharing\) Regulations 2018](#)
- [Family Violence Protection Act 2008 \(Vic.\)](#)
- [Family Violence Protection \(Information Sharing\) Regulations 2018](#)
- [Child Information Sharing Scheme Ministerial Guidelines](#)
- [Family Violence Information Sharing Guidelines](#)
- [Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework](#)
- [Information Sharing and Family Violence Reforms Contextualised Guidance](#)



Diocese of Sale
Catholic Education Ltd