

Ormiston Forge Academy

Critical Incident Policy

March 2017



Approved by the Governors Finance and General Purposes Committee under powers delegated by the Governing Body: **22nd March 2017**

Review period: **March 2019**

CRITICAL INCIDENTS DEFINED

Handling crises and dealing with difficult 'incidents' on a daily basis is viewed by some as a normal aspect of academy life. However, there are occasions when the academy will experience incidents of a significantly more extreme nature. What distinguishes these incidents is their nature and scale, and it is this type of occurrence, which has come to be termed a 'critical incident'.

What is a critical incident?

Although the concept of a critical incident is difficult to precisely define, authors who research and write in this field have, in the past, attempted to define critical incidents as:

'Unexpected occurrences, which may suddenly have a major impact on academy'.

However, in recent years some authors have noted that this type of description does not capture the relative nature of some critical incidents, which to some may seem relatively small-scale but, to others who experience them, can seem overwhelming. In this respect Gibson (1999) would suggest that an incident could be described in critical terms when it

'Overwhelms or overcomes the normal coping strategies and strengths of those involved'.

It is also important to note that this approach, which views critical incidents as situations or crises that are beyond the everyday experiences of academy life, contains an implied understanding that these incidents would be markedly distressing to a significant number of adults and children.

Preventative and precautionary measures

Whilst no amount of planning can totally prevent accidents and problems occurring, it is hoped that some can be prevented and the effects of others minimised by taking sensible precautionary measures. It is expected that;

- all staff and students should be familiar with the academy's routines for fire and the evacuation of the academy building on hearing the fire alarm.
- all staff should be familiar with the routines and procedures for dealing with emergencies (as detailed in this Policy).
- all staff and students should be familiar with the academy's security procedures, in particular that all visitors not wearing a visitor's badge should be questioned and escorted to reception.
- all staff organising academy trips and visits follow the guidelines and write a risk assessment to be signed off by the Principal
- all staff should sign in and out of the premises
- all staff are aware of students with medical needs or health problems
- all staff are aware of school policy in dealing with violence at work.

- all staff are aware that they should assess associated risks to children before carrying out a curriculum or other activity

- all staff are aware that they are responsible for assessing risks to themselves before undertaking an activity

A major incident may be defined as:

- An accident leading to a serious injury or fatality;
- Severe injury or severe stress;
- Circumstances in which a person or persons might be at serious risk of illness;
- Circumstances in which any part, or whole of the school is unable to function as normal due to external influences and
- Any situation in which the national press or media might be involved

As such, major incidents include:

- Death of a student or member of staff;
- Death or serious injury on an academy trip;
- Epidemic in academy or community;
- Violent incident in academy;
- A student missing from home;
- Destruction or major vandalism in academy;
- A hostage taking;
- A transport accident involving academy members;
- A disaster in the community;
- A civil disturbance or terrorism
- Arson attacks on the academy
- Major fire at the academy
- Significant vandalism
- Student suicides and/or sudden deaths
- Violent attacks on students and staff members
- The sudden death, in tragic circumstances of members of staff
- Incident involving an intruder, believed to be armed, on academy premises
- Road traffic accidents, involving fatalities within the academy community
- Abductions / disappearances
- Allegations or actual incidents of abuse against students by staff.
- Incidents involving the murder of academy children that attracted the attention of national and international media over prolonged periods
- Floods
- Academy site used in an emergency

In the event of such an incident the priorities of those adults in charge of the academy or trip at the time must be able to:

- Save life
- Minimise personal injury
- Safeguard the interests of students and staff
- Minimise loss and to return to normal working quickly

Critical Incident Management Team will comprise some or all of the following:

- Principal
- Senior Vice-Principal
- Finance Director
- Inclusion Vice Principal/Designated Senior Person
- Marketing Manager
- Chair or Vice Chair of Governors
- Site Manager

The academy's reaction to a critical incident can be divided into the following categories:

- a) Immediate action
- b) Short term action
- c) Medium term action
- d) Longer term action

IMMEDIATE ACTION – i.e. within hours of the incident occurring

1. Obtain and collate information relating to the incident – uncertainty breeds rumour and accurate information is essential;
2. Gather and brief the CIMT (Critical Incident Management Team) – brief the whole staff team, allocate roles and responsibilities;
3. Trigger support from OAT and other contacts on emergency list – establish clearly who is going to contact whom;
4. Set up an incident management room and dedicated phone line – to deal with calls from anxious parents etc. CIMT should agree a factual statement and avoid speculation;
5. Contact families affected – must be done quickly and with sensitivity. Consistency of information is vital. It may be appropriate for families to come to the academy and immediate emotional support could be a possibility;

6. Make arrangements to inform other parents – may need to take advice from OAT, especially if there is the possibility of legal liability. CIMT may wish to send a letter to parents, or prepare a leaflet.
7. Inform teaching and other academy staff – staff need to be cautioned about talking to the media or responding to questions from reporters. It is vital that all staff in contact with students are kept well informed and feel secure in handling comments or questions from students.
8. Inform students – can be done in small or large groups depending on which is most appropriate. Care needs to be exercised to protect both children or adults closely involved in the incident. It is important that children receive a consistent account of the incident allowing for differences in their ability to understand.
9. Encourage people involved to talk – the incident may need to be discussed before children go home for the day, for both students and adults.
10. Deal with the media – most important to seek advice from OAT before agreeing to speak to or be interviewed by the media. If this is not an option then an agreed text for release should be prepared by the CIMT and a designated spokesperson briefed and prepared to respond on the academy's behalf.
11. Devise a plan for handling the reactions and feelings of people affected – the most common reactions will include denial, distress, guilt, anger and helplessness. CIMT need to consider outside professionals to support and debrief staff and students affected by the incident. Those providing support also need support. At this point the CIMT will need to plan their short term reaction to the incident.

SHORT TERM ACTION – the next stage

1. Reunion of children with their families – especially where the incident occurs outside the academy. Mostly children will need to be brought home, but sometimes parents and families need to visit the scene of the incident to understand how they deal with repercussions in terms of children's fears etc.
2. Managing staff – support needs organising for all staff, preferably from within the academy, but using outside agencies if appropriate. Staff monitoring should be a priority, even members of the CIMT. If a crisis persists over many hours staff become tired, weary and upset and this affects their powers to make sensible decisions.
3. Encourage students to talk – activate strategies for enabling young people to talk about the incident, and their feelings, using outside agencies if appropriate. Staff will need briefing about ways to help the children affected by the incident, and how to identify patterns of behaviour etc. This may have implications for the wider curriculum i.e. training in bereavement counselling for staff, provision of a range of books, PSHE discussions etc...
4. Debriefing meeting – it may be appropriate to hold a debriefing meeting for staff, children and parents to:- clarify what has happened

- allow for sharing reactions
- reassure people that reactions are normal
- mobilise resources e.g. parental support groups

An experienced person, possibly someone from outside the academy community, should lead this meeting.

Formal and informal recognition of rituals – it is important to remember to express sympathy to families of the hurt or bereaved. Visits to children/staff in hospital. Students may wish to send cards and letters. The academy may also need to consider attendance at funerals, and/or the desirability of holding special assemblies or memorial services. Anniversaries are also key times when support and sensitivity are required.

Re-establishing routines – every attempt should be made to provide continuity for the children. The return to academy of staff or students directly affected by the crisis will need to be managed carefully and with sensitivity but the re-establishment of routine is an important stage in emotional recovery.

MEDIUM TERM ACTION

1. Return to academy for staff or students after long absence – reintegration will need to be planned carefully, and may involve home visits prior to return, part time attendance initially, reducing workloads, putting in place mentoring process etc.
2. Consulting professionals – consideration should be given to consulting the Educational Psychology Service for support and guidance, especially to help those showing unusual or prolonged reaction to the incident.
3. Keeping parents informed – it may be appropriate to produce a leaflet for parents giving guidance on the possible delayed reactions of students to an incident and making suggestions to help them deal with these.
4. Support for staff – ongoing monitoring and support for staff is a major consideration. CIMT especially will not be immune to reaction from their ordeal.

LONG TERM ACTION

Monitoring the vulnerable – the effects of a crisis can reverberate for years, and it is especially important that new staff and students are briefed in the academy's history to help them understand and deal with potential repercussions especially at anniversary times.

Marking anniversaries – these difficult times need to be treated with sensitivity. Some suggestions for academies to mark anniversaries are by annual concerts, memorial services, memorial prize giving ceremonies, memorial gardens etc ...

Legal processes – the length of time taken over some legal processes can prolong the recovery process following a critical incident. CIMT may need to plan for this especially where staff may be involved attending legal processes, and facing extended emotional trauma.

Curriculum implications – it may be appropriate to schedule INSET training for staff in loss counselling, bereavement etc.

Action Cards

It may be useful for the CIMT to consider and devise a set of Action cards.

The Action Cards give responsibilities for specified staff in the event of a critical incident

(a) away from the academy

(b) in the academy environment

These should be used in the event of a major incident and be carried by staff on academy visits.

Due to the nature of academy life, which includes the absence of staff on courses, at meetings etc. The following are three possible suggestions.

ACTION CARD 1.

GUIDANCE FOR ACADEMY STAFF IN EVENT OF A MAJOR INCIDENT IN ACADEMY

- Obtain facts and information
- Call the emergency services using 999
- Retain any relevant equipment
- Inform rest of academy staff and children as appropriate
- Ensure register of all children is maintained
- Contact local authority for advice
- Contact chair of governors
- Contact health and safety reps
- Prepare to deal with the media

ACTION CARD 2

GUIDANCE FOR ACADEMY STAFF IN EVENT OF A MAJOR INCIDENT OFF SITE

- Administer first aid as appropriate
- Establish a contact point with the emergency services
- Allocate responsibility to ensure other students are safe including registering
- Inform academy
- Use systems e.g. Phone/Parent Mail to communicate with parents
- Travel with casualties to hospital
- Complete accident forms

ACTION CARD 3

GUIDANCE FOR ACADEMY STAFF IN EVENT OF A MAJOR INCIDENT ON SITE – E.g. Fire/Flood

- Keep a record of witnesses
- Keep others informed of situation
- Ensure register of all children is maintained
- Arrange for non-casualties to evacuate academy and relocate to other premises

- Use systems e.g. Phone/ParentMail to communicate with parents
- Manage traffic onto the site to ensure that emergency access vehicles can arrive
- Care for relatives arriving at academy
- Remain available to emergency

Ormiston Protocols

Occasionally emergency situations arise, and in such eventualities you will follow your Academy emergency procedures to assemble an incident response team to deal with the situation. Your emergency procedure must include informing OAT Head Office as early as possible. This is to ensure that the situation can be managed strategically at a national level with the Press, DFE, or other authorities depending upon the nature of the emergency.

To help academies easily and quickly inform head office of a situation a new emergency notification service is now in place.

The service is to be used by academies when they first know about a serious situation, such as:

- Serious injury to a pupil or member of staff (e.g. transport or school trip accident)
- Significant damage to school property (e.g. fire, environmental)
- Criminal activity (e.g. bomb threat)
- Severe weather (e.g. flooding)
- Public health incidents (e.g. influenza pandemic)
- Ofsted and/or DFE inspection
- The effects of a disaster in the local community.

To use the service simply dial 0800 368 8804 anytime of the day or night.

1. The line is automatically answered at PLMR with the message "Thank you for calling the Ormiston Executive Contact Line."
2. It then rings through to one of the PLMR team.
3. PLMR will take the callers contact details and short explanation of the emergency incident
4. PLMR will then contact the appropriate member of OAT executive to provide strategic support.