



Critical Incident Policy

Definition:

An emergency or critical incident occurs when there is an actual or imminent event which endangers or threatens the safety or health of a person or persons or which destroys or damages, or threatens to destroy or damage, any property. They can range from small scale localised incidents through to large scale events requiring state coordination and assistance from external agencies.

Rationale:

The purpose of this policy is to ensure, as much as possible, a safe environment for staff and students during a critical incident. Having clearly defined procedures may assist in improving response time and minimising the impact on individuals.

The process in this policy is those developed by Adventist Schools Australia (ASA) and contextualised for Hilliard Christian School.

Aims:

- To minimise any damage from a critical incident.
- Create a safe and supportive environment for staff and students.
- Ensure as rapid a return to normal as possible after the incident.
- Improve the response time of critical incident management.
- Ensure the school is prepared as possible for critical incidents.

Implementation:

1. A Critical event can cause normally stable and healthy people to experience strong emotional or psychological distress, and interferes with their ability to function normally, either at the time of the event or later.
2. This disruption may result from experiencing or witnessing any shocking, horrifying or violent circumstance such as a natural or man-made disaster, a serious accident, physical violence, an acute personal threat or a significant loss.
3. With appropriate support, most people can deal with these situations and soon return to normal function. For a few people, referral to specialist professional help may be necessary to aid recovery.
4. Hilliard Christian School's response to any critical incident will be calculated to ensure as rapid a return to normal as possible after the incident, the physical and emotional well-being of staff and students being of utmost priority.
5. Our goals are:
 - An optimum response at a time of instability.
 - Recovery from any trauma or dysfunction due to the incident.
 - Return to normal routines.
 - A sense of cohesiveness within the school community.

Hilliard Christian School – Critical Incident Policy

- A sense of responsibility and control over situations which may arise.
 - A demonstration of caring and support at a time of need.
 - A minimisation of short term and long-term disruption to personal and professional function.
6. Emergencies that may affect the school community:
- Fire.
 - Damage to buildings.
 - Attempted or actual abductions.
 - Bomb or firearms threats.
 - Disappearance of students.
 - Fatalities of students or staff.
 - Serious injuries/assaults/sexual assaults.
 - Fumes or spills of hazardous materials..
 -
7. Critical Incidents that may affect the school community:
- The death or critical injury of a student, teacher or prominent school community member.
 - The destruction of the whole or part, of the school.
 - Major vandalism.
 - The murder of a student or teacher.
 - Death or misadventure on a school excursion.
 - Students witnessing serious injury or death.
 - Student or teacher 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.
 - Social abuse of students or teachers.
 - Media coverage of issues in a way which creates concerns in the school community.

Preparation

While it is impossible to anticipate and prepare for a specific incident, the school can make general preparations. These include:

- Marking all escape routes with diagrams.
- Familiarising teachers with evacuation procedures.
- Holding emergency evacuation drills at intervals throughout the school year – at least once per term.
- Identifying a network of support people to be called upon in case of trauma.
- Ensuring the emergency equipment is in proper working order.
- Maintaining an up-to-date list of phone numbers of resource/support persons.
- Developing a Critical Incident Plan.
- Establishing a Critical Incident Management Team.
- Careful attention to preparations of Risk assessment for all onsite and off-site activities.

Response to an Incident

1. Responsibility for dealing with any incident that affects the school and its community rests with the Principal who should delegate as many tasks as possible so as to be available for making decisions necessary in any crisis situation. The Deputy or another senior staff member will assume

Hilliard Christian School – Critical Incident Policy

- responsibility should the Principal be a victim or be personally involved in any incident to the extent that may render him/her unable to function normally.
2. Frequently administration and staff do not realise how debilitating the situation has become. It is crucial that even the most effective administrator or staff member acknowledge that he/she may be affected to the point where there is a need to take a 'time out', seek counselling, or hand over their responsibilities.
 3. In the event of an incident *in the school* the Principal (or delegate) will:
 - Assess the nature of the emergency.
 - Decide the appropriate action.
 - Delegate tasks to appropriate persons
 - Make the necessary calls for help, or send an appropriate person for help.
 - Ensure that appropriate safety precautions are taken, e.g., evacuation of the premises.
 - Confirm information prior to briefing staff.
 - Ensure that information is correct and given in such a manner as to minimise distortions and rumours.
 - Maintain control of the student/staff body and attempt to reassure them and support them.
 - Brief emergency crews when they arrive.
 - If the event is small scale and outside help is not called, determine when it is safe/ appropriate to return to normal operation
 - Determine the need/advisability of informing parents or guardians.
 - Function as the authorised spokesperson to the media. It is the responsibility of the administration to ensure that they are aware of the implications of negligence and the legal ramifications of unauthorised or inappropriate disclosure of information (see Dealing with the Media).
 4. In the event of an incident experienced by students or staff *outside the school or outside school hours*, the Principal (or delegate) will:
 - Contact appropriate staff and, before classes begin, brief staff and prepare strategies for dealing with student reactions.
 - Confirm information prior to briefing staff.
 - Ensure that information is correct and given in such a manner as to minimise distortions and rumours.
 - Determine, in consultation with the Associate Education Director for Adventist Schools Tasmania and staff, whether the Critical Incident Management team should be called in.

Moving from Response to Recovery

1. It is important to recognise the existence of the recovery aspect associated with incidents. The initial incident and the immediate response are clearly identifiable as part of emergency management planning and procedures. But it is the recovery activity that will determine the extent to which members of the school community will cope with the long-term effects of a critical incident.
2. While the immediate physical safety and well-being of staff and students is the initial concern, the recovery activity addresses the long term physical and emotional wellbeing of individuals. A number of emergency services in Tasmania will respond to calls for immediate assistance, e.g. police, fire brigade, etc. During the emergency *they* will assume legal responsibility for control and coordination at the incident site. As the immediate crisis passes, it is important that effective recovery activities follow. This will often involve advice from the Education Office of the Tasmanian Conference and other agencies as may be appropriate.

Hilliard Christian School – Critical Incident Policy

3. Victims of critical incidents often deny that the event has had any significant impact on them, and they tend to overlook the value of external support. Distress and trauma may be minimised by:
 - Speed of response
 - Appropriateness of response
 - The opportunity to talk about the event and personal reactions to it
 - Ongoing support.

Defusing and Debriefing

1. Debriefing are techniques that aim to:
 - Mitigate the impact of the Critical Incident.
 - Accelerate recovery.
 - Facilitate the provision of support to those affected.
2. Defusing and Debriefing provide the opportunity to ventilate pent-up feelings. They provide opportunities for stress reduction, education, emotional reassurance and forewarning, for those involved, of what signs and symptoms of distress may materialise later. They enhance group cohesiveness and cooperation and serve as an opportunity for screening of those requiring further assistance and referral.
3. These processes will require professional guidance and will take place under the school counsellor or the Critical Incident Management (CIM) team.
4. Defusing occurs within 8 hours of the event and allows exploration of the facts and responses, providing opportunity for teaching about possible responses to trauma and strategies for coping.
5. It is in the interest of each individual, and the school, that all students and staff be defused after a critical incident.
6. The defusing process alerts facilitators to those who may need to join a debriefing at a later date or receive further specialised help.
7. Debriefing is a longer process (up to 3 hours) which provides an opportunity for a group to recall and retell their experience, discuss their feelings, share what they have learned from the experience in terms of their own response and ways of coping, and learn normal reactions to them.
8. It is vital that debriefing be facilitated by people trained in the process. In particular, the use of debriefing with adolescents' needs to be conducted by professionals familiar their particular needs.

Dealing with the Media

1. Any contact by the media or statements made to the media must be through the school Principal (or delegate).
2. Media are not allowed onto school premises unless the Principal (or delegate) has granted permission.
3. Staff and student privacy must be respected.
4. Ensure that information is correct and given in such a manner as to minimise distortions and rumours.
5. It is the responsibility of the administration to ensure that they are aware of the implications of negligence and the legal ramifications of unauthorised or inappropriate disclosure of information.
6. Do not release the names of any deceased to the media (it is normal practice for police to inform next of kin).
7. It is important to be honest and as open as is prudent with the media to forestall the possibility of negative reports regarding the school.

Hilliard Christian School – Critical Incident Policy

Notification of the School’s Governing Body

- Within hours of the critical incident and when the situation has passed the response stage, the Director of Education (Tasmania) Ltd., and the chair of the Board of Directors, Adventist Schools (Tasmania) Ltd., are to be informed of the critical incident.
- In the first instance this notification must be given by telephone and then followed up with written advice including actions taken in response to the incident.

Notification of the Office of Education Registrar

Within hours of the critical incident, and in the event that a student:

(a) dies as a result of an incident while in the care of the school; or
(b) is hospitalised as a result of an incident while in the care of the school and that hospitalisation continues for more than 3 days, the Director of Education (Tasmania) Ltd., in conjunction with the chair of the Board of Directors, Adventist Schools (Tasmania) Ltd. will notify Office of Education Registrar, Tasmania.

- In the first instance this notification must be given by telephone and then followed up with written advice including actions taken in response to the incident.

Critical Incident Management Team

- Principal
- ELC Director, Primary and/or Secondary Coordinator (as most relevant to the incident)
- Property Services/WHS Coordinator
- School Psychologist
- School Chaplain
- Business Manager.

Evaluation:

- This policy will be reviewed annually as part of the Board of Directors’ Review process.

Document Information

Document Name	Critical Incident Policy
Approver	Seventh-day Adventist Schools (TAS) Board of Directors
Last Approved Date	31 st January 2024
Review Date	February, 2025
Audience	Staff, parents, Community
Links	
Custodian	Principal