**Post Impact – Response**

The following are the steps a school might take in dealing with a critical incident. It should be noted that not all of the points will be appropriate in all situations. Decisions about which other actions to initiate should be taken in light of the nature and severity of the incident, and other professionals/agencies should be involved where appropriate.

1.. Decide on scale of incident, scale of response and draft timetable – and which support agencies to involve

2. Contact families (most affected families first - others later)

3. Call a staff meeting to give information

4. Inform pupils in small groups

5. Promote discussion in classes.

**Decide on the scale of the incident, scale of response, draft timetable and which support agencies to involve**

All schools should have to hand up to date lists of contact agencies covering all eventualities. This list should have been constructed at the contingency planning stage, and updated at regular intervals.

In the literature, where schools have been surveyed on their ideas about critical incidents, there are wide variations in the kinds of incident schools would see as ‘critical’. For example, if the incident consists of an act of vandalism outwith school hours, perhaps only the police might need to be contacted. On the other hand, if the death of a teacher or a pupil is involved, a number of agencies might be called on.

It is useful to think in terms of the population of people impacted by the event, and to track the reverberations outwards from the point of impact.

This process gives a good indication both of the groups of people who might need help, and of the external agencies to be contacted.

## **Contact families (most affected families first – others later)**

The families of young people affected directly by a critical incident need to be contacted as early as possible, and given full and accurate information. They may need to come to the school to receive it. The police normally have the responsibility of informing families after accidents or serious incidents.

The member of staff dealing with this aspect should be well briefed, have a rehearsed, uniform message to relate, and should keep careful notes of those family members informed and their reaction. The family’s need for continued support should be noted where appropriate.

For parents of children not directly affected by the incident, contact can be made by telephone. The person responsible for this should prepare a statement giving all the essential facts. They should keep a note of those contacted, and still to be contacted. If possible, a telephone tree can be operated. It may be useful to ask neighbours to support each other, or to give information on support agencies. Some parents might be interested in acting as helpers.

## **Call a staff meeting to give information**

As soon as an incident occurs, the senior management team of the school should meet. Education Services should be contacted. The crisis management team should be assembled, and roles assigned to deal with the particular requirements of this crisis.

A staff meeting should be convened by the head teacher involving all staff if possible, and groups of staff if not. Both teaching staff and support staff should attend the meeting, which ensures that the same information is shared and that rumours do not circulate, causing distress. As well as factual information on the incident, information should be provided about the feelings and reactions people may have in the first few days. Formal operational debriefing should follow for all staff and support staff who were closely involved in the incident, within 48 hours. Staff should also be advised that they should not talk to the media but that all enquiries should b directed to the Corporate Communications Team.

## **Inform pupils in small groups**

Students should be told simply, clearly and honestly what has happened. (Guidance on this can be found in the “Informing Others” section of this pack within the “Post Impact” stage. This should take place in small groups with a teacher who knows them well. Any questions should be answered as straightforwardly as possible, and speculation about the causes of the crisis and its consequences should be avoided. Before speaking to classes, consideration should be given to any particular pupils who might be seriously affected by the news - siblings in other classes, special classmates, neighbours. If necessary, these pupils should be given the information separately by a member of staff well known to them.

Closure of the school should, as a general rule, be avoided. Routine is important in times of crisis.

If deaths have occurred, all children and staff who wish to do so should be allowed to attend funerals and memorial services. Children should be encouraged to devise ritual ways of acknowledging the deaths.

Information should be relayed to other schools in the area, where children’s relatives may be affected by the news.

## **Promote Discussion in Class**

Even for children who have undergone forms of debriefing, there should be frequent opportunities for discussion and group consultations in the days and weeks following a critical incident. The classroom is an ideal focus for such interactions. It is the best site to address children’s fears of recurrence, and the associated cognitive distortions (Pynoos and Nader 1987). Anxiety, even among non-exposed fellow students and teachers, can cause more general classroom changes in behaviour, and disrupt the educational process. Well-designed classroom consultation can offer an opportunity for enhancing coping skills. For directly exposed children, the existence of a cohesive, secure, and less anxious classroom environment can be of great importance in providing the proper opportunity during the school day for recovery.

Classroom discussions can have the positive effects of:

* Providing permission to express feelings
* Clarifying cognitive confusions
* Screening children informally for exposure, traumatic response and risk factors
* Promoting renewed classroom cohesion and ongoing learning
* Encouraging help-seeking from parents, teachers, psychologists and nurses.

Circle time is a powerful medium for the above effects to be realised, and its growing use in Scottish schools will offer new opportunities for these agendas to be raised. Issues such as death and loss which have often been quietly but definitely ignored in classrooms should find a place in such discussions well in advance of any trauma occurring, and can then be approached much more naturally when there *is* an incident.

Adapted from Liddle. I. .................