

**PRACTICAL OVERVIEW OF CISM RESPONSE  
APPENDICES**

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## P1 .....Administrator's Critical Incident Response Checklist

The following checklist was developed to facilitate an effective response *during*, and in the aftermath of a School-Based critical incident. This list will require modification to address the nature of the critical incident and should not take the place of competent professional services. By reaching our school community early, we can potentially prevent the acute stress reactions of today from becoming the *chronic* stress disorders of tomorrow. (Lerner, 1997)

### Fact Gathering

- Clarify facts surrounding the critical incident.
- Contact Superintendent of Student Services, or designate.
- Contact parents/guardians of individuals involved/affected.
- Obtain consent for release of information.
- Contact police and /or fire department. (If necessary)
- Principal consults with vice-principal and/or School-Based CISM Team.
- Determine the need for mobilizing the CISM Team.

### The Call to Action

- Mobilizing the Critical Incident Response Team.
- Share facts with team members and assess the impact of the crisis.
- Complete CISM strategic planning worksheet. (Page 7)
  - o When did the event occur? (During a lunch period, over the summer)
  - o Where did the event occur? (On school grounds)
  - o How did it happen?
  - o How many students and staff are affected by the event?
  - o Which students and staff are affected?
  - o How is the staff responding?
  - o Should classes be suspended temporarily or assignments altered?
  - o Should students be released from school?
  - o How are students indirectly being affected? (Siblings/friends at other buildings in the district etc.)
- Determine if additional support services are needed. (Psychologists, social workers, counsellors from other buildings/agencies outside school system)
  - o Weigh efficacy of "unknown" professionals.
  - o Provide identification badges for outside professionals.
- Update Superintendent of Student Services

## Notification Procedures

Consider:

- Critical Management Brief (CMB) shared with students and staff. (Page 11)
- CMB.
- A student assembly. (May or may not be appropriate)
- Location of support personnel. (E.g. library)
- Need for students to sign out of class and in with support personnel.
- Mailbox memorandum to staff.
- Emergency staff meeting. (First thing in the morning)
- Critical Management Brief (CMB) shared with students in classrooms by principal, classroom teacher or CISM Team member.

## Critical Incident Team in Motion

- Administrators and staff circulate through the building.
- "Pockets" of grieving students should be directed to location of support personnel.
- Consider letter to be sent to students' homes –facts, summary, reactions, and contact numbers. Consult with Communication Officer.
- CISM Team members should visit selected classrooms to provide opportunity for discussion.
- Teachers should allow opportunity for students to ventilate.
- Individual and small group intervention by School-Based CISM, social workers, psychologist, mental health workers, and/or guidance counselors may occur.
- Attempt to cultivate a helping relationship characterized by empathy, warmth, and genuineness.
- Encourage people to express their feelings.
- Avoid clichés such as, "Be strong....." and "Your doing so well....." Such clichés may only serve to reinforce an individual's feelings of alones.
- Attempt to "normalize" grief reactions.
- Remember that cultural differences exist in the overt expression of emotions.
- Maintaining confidentiality, when possible, is crucial.
- Provide snacks (juice, cookies etc.) to students and support staff.
- It is important to remember that we have support while helping others during this difficult time.
- Identify "high risk" individuals.
- Contact parents/guardians of high risk students.
- Provide referrals for outside support. (If necessary)
- Provide hot-line numbers to parents/guardians for after school hours. (If necessary)
- Carefully document events.
- Consider open forum for parents. (After school hours)
- Schedule follow up by support personnel for high risk individuals.
- Schedule staff meeting.
- Remain sensitive to how team members are being perceived.

## **Addressing the Media**

- Develop a media response – consider confidentiality, family wishes, liability of erroneous information.
- Designate a spokesperson. (No one else talks). The spokesperson is the Director.
- Designate alternate spokesperson.

## **Debriefing**

- Review the events of the day.
- Revise the intervention strategies. ( E.g.: plan for upcoming days)
- Monitor reactions of crisis team members “compassion fatigue”.

## **Funeral**

- Consider the wishes of the family involved.
- Consider the wishes of the family involved regarding attendance.
- Consider the age of the students attending.
- Consider the number of staff attending.
- Have support personnel available at funeral.

## **Memorialization**

- Consider appropriateness.
- Consider method.
- A dedication.
- Flying the school flag at half mast.
- A moment of silence.
- A plaque.
- Planting a tree.

## **P2 .....A Principal's Response to an Unexpected Death (Sample)**

### **Overview: Nature of Event**

Accidents happen frequently. If one of their students or staff is involved, schools must be prepared to deal with the reactions of their students, parents and staff. If the accident happened in the community during school hours, the notification must be done at school. If it happened after school or on a weekend, the Critical Incident Stress Management Team (CISM) will have some time to plan their response.

### **Plan:**

- Confirm information.
- Convene Critical Incident Response Team.
- Notify Superintendent of Student Services, or designate.
- Deploy CISM Team members to act as liaisons to each hospital.
- If accident happened on the way to school begin notifying parents or guardians of injured children to go to the appropriate hospital.
- Access emergency medical information on injured and relay to hospital.
- Write a statement for the media. Consult with Communication Officer.
- Write a statement or fact sheet to be used by the people answering the telephones.
- Write a CMB to be read by CISM Team members in each classroom. (Page 11)
- Assist classroom teachers to allow students to talk about event.
- Activate additional support resources.
- Gather supplies for Drop-In Rooms.
- Set up Drop-In Rooms.
- Document all actions taken.

### **Continuing Response**

- Hold a meeting for all School-Based Team members.
- Assign CISM team members to be visible through out school.
- Update information.
- Request additional resources if needed.
- Mobilize counseling resources from neighboring school if necessary.
- Contact business to get juice, cookies, Kleenex and other supplies for Drop-In Room.
- Have staff members or community mental health professionals to be available by phone to answer parent's questions.
- Discuss anticipated reactions.
- Identify "high-risk" students and staff.
- Principal prepare statement for media. Director is spokesperson for media.
- Have family liaison contact victim's families to support.

**P3 .....Special Considerations**

When an accident happens that involves your students, staff or other community members, the entire school community can be disrupted. When the accident is a traffic accident, there may be speculation about the cause, was alcohol or other drugs involved, who was at fault, etc. Rumor control will be a major issue for you to handle. In addition, the reaction to any injury or loss to your school community can be very emotional. High school age children can be very emotional and vulnerable following an accident.

**Key Resources**

- Provide Critical Incident Stress Management activities to your school.
- A Parent/Community Informational Evening may be necessary to restore parents' beliefs that their children are safe.
- If the event is a very traumatic one, using "outsiders" may be the best way to deal with it.
- Arranging with neighboring schools to mobilize their counselling staff in the event of a critical incident is another way to have extra resources available.
- Collaborate with community agencies that will be able to provide support.

**Drop-In Room Considerations**

Student Drop-In Rooms

- Staffed by at least two people.
- Equipped with Kleenex, writing materials, stuffed animals, cookies and juice and information on typical reactions.
- Create an attendance procedure.
- Manage the tendency for students to leave classrooms and wander around.

Staff Drop-In Rooms

- Staffed by at least two people that the staff trust (could be a local mental health professional or community law enforcement, chaplain or other outsider that has implied credibility) and has an element of privacy.
- A mechanism for staff to be relieved of their duties for a few minutes needs to be in place prior to the event and then talked about during the **Before-School Staff Meeting**.

**Parent/Community Informational Meeting Considerations**

- Hold a Parent/Community Informational Meeting.
- Prepare an agenda.
- Allow community members to express their concerns and get information.
- Format should allow interaction and a forum to ask questions.
- Invite local law enforcement officer to answer questions.
- Chaplin or mental health professional can provide information on typical reactions.
- Arrange for transportation and child care if appropriate.
- Expect parents to be angry, sad or scared.
- Students may also wish to participate.
- Encourage parents to talk with their child about their reactions.
- Anticipate that media may attend meeting. Manage them by setting up interviews with key people and giving them information ahead of time on what will be presented.
- Be sensitive to the victim's family and the tendency to place blame.

**DAY 1**

**Before School**

- Hold a staff meeting. (Organized by School-Based CISM Team)
- Attended by all staff: teachers, custodians, bus drivers etc.
- Share information, reactions and identify “high-risk” students or other vulnerable people.
- May be attended by local law enforcement or others to provide support and information.
- Agenda should provide general information on the incident as well as specific information about its aftermath.
- Students need to see healthy modeling of grief but still see that the significant adults in their lives are in control.
- Some staff may need additional help in the classroom or a few days off.
- Encourage staff not to discuss who was to blame or at fault pertaining to the accident.
- Remind students not to spread rumors or speculative comments.
- Remind staff that students need structure but also realistic expectations.
- Students may have difficulty concentrating or remembering details so postponing scheduled test or quizzes are a good idea.

**First Period**

- Crucial time for rumor control.
- Give accurate and correct information without giving graphic details. (CMB)
- Help students deal with reality not supposition and rumors.
- Use the classroom to discuss the incident and normal reactions.
- Focus on reactions of the students and what feelings they may experience.
- Start to determine which students may be more vulnerable and refer them to a counsellor or CISM Team member.
- Remind students that unless they hear a “fact” from an adult in authority, not to repeat it.

**Plan:**

- Have a teacher or CISM Team member read the CMB that was prepared. Two people should be present.
- Allow students a chance to talk about their reactions.
- Answer questions as honestly as you can without being too graphic.
- Students unable to maintain in a supportive classroom environment should be given a pass to the Drop-In Room.
- Tell students where extra help and support will be available for the rest of the day.
- Encourage students to be aware of each other and walk a classmate to an adult if they need help.
- Encourage students to talk to their parents about reactions.
- Encourage students to use healthy coping mechanisms to deal with this tragedy, not unhealthy ones such as alcohol or drug use, sex or other risky behavior.

- Encourage students to write notes or make cards for anyone hospitalized or injured.

### **Rest of the Day**

- Students may isolate themselves. Check bathrooms, closets, cars, parking lots, hallways etc. Check every 15 minutes or so.
- When preparing the letter to go home for parents:
  - Be sensitive to police investigations.
  - Be sensitive to the victim's family.
  - Express condolences for the family.
  - Provide information on possible reactions.
  - Cite community resources.
  - Include 24 hour phone support number.
  - Information on Parent/Community Information Night.

### **Plan**

- Set up Drop-In Rooms for both staff and students.
- Collect information on typical traumatic reactions and have available.
- If counsellors or psychologist come to assist, have them sign in and out.
- Activate referral process for "at risk" students.
- CISM Team remains visible on campus.
- If there was a death, purchase a scrapbook for students and staff to write notes, draw pictures or add photographs to be given to the family in about two weeks.
- Check bathrooms, parking lots and out of the way areas every 15 minutes.
- Prepare a statement letter to go home to parents.
- Do not release "high-risk" students from school to go home unless a parent has been contacted.
- At the end of the school day contact victim's families, hospitals or others for updates.

### **After School**

- Have a staff meeting to allow staff members to decompress. (Include all staff members)
- Break up into small groups of 8-10 and give them a chance to talk about what the worst part of their day was for them.
- Bring everyone back into large group and share information.
- Identify those students that may need some additional help.
- Do not allow media to attend the staff meeting.
- Distribute printed information on typical reactions.
- Distribute information on mental health or counselling benefits available for staff.
- Encourage staff to avoid alcohol caffeine and sugar for the evening and to take very good care of themselves.

**Things to Emphasize**

- Do not clean out the students locker or desk and do not remove any artwork etc. for a day or two.
- Principal and other key team members begin hospital visitations to those who are injured.
- Get injured student's parent's permission for classmates to visit in hospital.

**Things to Avoid**

- Announcements over the intercom or PA system.
- Large memorials or assemblies.
- Give information in large groups. (Assemblies)

**DAY 2**

Having a short staff meeting before school may be an appropriate on Day 2. If there is new information, new resources coming to the school, a new referral procedure for at-risk students, updated information on injuries, information on any funerals and how staff who would like to go can arrange to do that, or other pertinent information, plan a meeting for all staff before school begins. If there is no new information and it seems as though all questions and concerns were addressed at yesterday's after school meeting, instead of a meeting this morning, prepare a bulletin and distribute to all staff. Thank them for their care and concern, remind them to refer high-risk or vulnerable students, give some strategies for self-care and outline the plan for the day.

Plan

- Notify staff of time and place of meetings.
- Set up coffee.
- Print any informational material you are going to distribute.
- Arrange room.
- Conduct meeting.
- Begin arranging for CISM activities for staff and students.
- Start planning Parent/Community Information Night if appropriate.
- Make signs with Crisis Line Numbers listed and post throughout the school.
- During first period, update students with new information that is appropriate.
- If students are planning to visit injured in the hospital, discuss proper etiquette.
- Do classroom activities that encourage students to talk or express feelings or reactions.
- Give students information on Drop-In Room and how to access it.
- Check bathrooms, closets, hallways, parking lots, etc every 15 minutes.
- If a family has requested students or staff speak at a funeral service, hold a brief meeting of those people to discuss what is both expected and appropriate.
- Begin talking with students about proper etiquette while at the funeral service or while viewing the body.
- Contact the funeral home for information on viewing procedures and hours.

### **DAY 3**

By the third day, the school community is beginning to settle down again into its normal routine. There may be students returning to school for the first time since the incident. Support them as they return to school. It's also possible that your normal routine may be interrupted by a funeral service on this day or one of the following days. On the day a service is held, make provisions for students with parental permission to attend. Encourage parents to attend with their child. Arrange substitutes for any staff that wish to attend. If the service is held in the morning, encourage everyone to come back to school for the afternoon. Expect an emotional day as people continue to deal with this incident. Use this time to encourage everyone to contribute to the scrapbook that will be given to the family.

#### Plan

- Check bathrooms, closets, hallways and parking lots every 15 minutes.
- Continue to provide ways for students to talk about their reactions.
- Encourage students to talk to someone they trust.
- Continue to monitor students for high-risk and refer if necessary.
- Contact mental health or other professionals and ask them to speak at the Parent/Community Informational Evening.

### **DAY 4**

By this time, your school may be beginning to appear normal again. Expect occasional outburst of emotion.

#### Plan

- Continue to check bathrooms, hallways, closets and parking lots every 15 minutes.
- Continue to refer students who may seem at-risk.
- Discontinue the Drop-In Room if students are not using it.
- Squelch rumors as they surface.
- If you have students returning for the first time, support their transition back to school.

### **DAY 5**

#### Plan:

- Continue to refer students who may seem at-risk.
- Encourage staff and students to contribute to the scrapbook.
- Squelch rumors as they surface.
- If you have students returning for the first time, support them with their transition back to school.

### **DAY 6**

#### Plan:

- If you have students returning for the first time, support them with their transition back to school.
- Continue to refer students who may seem at-risk.

## **DAY 7**

### **Plan:**

- Conduct a Parent Informational Meeting.
- Arrange for interviews with one or two key individuals.
- Be sensitive to the victim's families.
- Allow parents to express concern about their children's vulnerability.
- Give information on how parents can support their children.
- Reassure parents that the school is doing everything it can to help students recover.
- Bring in professionals to discuss warning signs of trouble and how to intervene.
- Prepare handouts for distribution at meeting.
- Thank parents for their support.
- Allow students to ask questions at this meeting also.
- Arrange for snacks and beverages.
- When it's over, write thank you notes to support teams.

### **First Month**

- During the first week or so, students and staff will talk a lot about the event.
- Remind students and staff that others are feeling the same and they are not alone.
- Remind students and staff that if they are having trouble eating, sleeping or making decisions they are experiencing normal reactions.
- After a few weeks it is important for people to know that it is OK to still talk about it.
- As investigations continue, funerals are held, victims are released from hospital or victims and their families return to school expect an increase in critical incident stress and be prepared to manage it.
- Expect conversations to once again focus on the event following new developments in the investigation.
- Continue to provide information on grief, stress and other typical reactions to tragedy.
- Remember for some the shock wont wear off for weeks or even months.

### **Beyond the First Month**

- Be aware of anniversaries or any other "trigger" events such as a birthday, Christmas, dance, field trip, yearbook, end of school year, etc.
- Taking a yearbook and having students sign it and then presenting it to the family may help.
- Allowing students to do something encourages closure.
- Each time there is a new development, the tragedy becomes fresh again, in many ways this can become a second victimization. Expect to continue dealing with reactions for some time to come.

**During the initial meeting teachers will:**

- Provide students with the information outlined in the CMB by the School-Based Team.
- Stress that we each react differently to tragedies and must respect one another's feelings and ways of reacting.
- Point out that grief, sadness, anger, guilt, fear and disbelief are all normal reactions in response to a critical incident and that support personnel are available.
- Provide an open and non-judgemental atmosphere in which students can share their feelings about the incident.
- Work with the School-Based CISM Team to identify target groups for defusing and/or debriefing. (E.g. students who witnessed the incident.)
- If student's reactions seem particularly intense or you feel unable to respond to them adequately, refer them to the CISM Team. Offer to accompany them to meet the CISM Team.
- If students have questions you are unable to answer, or if you are feeling uncomfortable in the discussion, request help from the School-Based CISM Team or support team member.
- Encourage students to be supportive of one another but stress the importance of seeking help or encouraging their friends to seek help from the CISM Team if their feelings seem more intense or persistent than "normal".
- Allow students who do not want to participate in the discussion to study quietly in the room or seek assistance from the support team. Don't assume that the lack of a visible reaction means that the student has no reaction.
- Help students (and parents when necessary) to distinguish between goodbye rituals, commemoration and memorialization.

Good bye rituals: what is done after a critical incident to bring closure and acceptance such as a scrapbook, flowers, etc.

Commemoration: a service or celebration in memory of the deceased person.

Memorialization: something designed or adapted to preserve the memory of a person such as an annual day or event, a monument, etc.

- Allow a much time as students need for the discussion. Try to move discussion toward how students can help one another express sympathy for the family.

<p><i>If the teacher is feeling overwhelmed, there are support services available e.g.: counsellors within the school division, S.T.F., etc.</i></p>
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**Teacher's will:**

- Announce events to students as outlined by the School-Based Team. (CMB)
- Lead class discussion.
- Identify students in need of support.
- Generate activities to reduce impact of trauma.
- Structure and shorten assignments.
- Discuss the idea of postponing testing.
- Recognize that classroom routines and management may be disrupted. (this is natural — be flexible)
- Determine whether extra counselling/support is needed for students/teacher in the classroom.
- Be aware that students congregating in large, unsupervised groups may result in intensifying traumatic emotional responses.
- Not permit grieving students to leave the school during school hours without parental permission.
- Determine, in consultation with School-Based Team when and how to remove the student's desk from the classroom in the event of a death.
- Work toward establishing normal classroom routines as soon as possible.