HEIGTHS COLLEGE

CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

Authorisation
Heights College Board
March 2010

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January 2014

Purpose
The purpose of this policy is to outline principles and procedures to be followed in order to manage critical incidents at Heights College. They are to be adhered to when:

- Preventing or preparing for;
- Responding to;
- Recovering from, an emergency.

Scope
This policy applies to all staff and students of the school, and provides information about areas of responsibility, reporting and communication regarding:

- Years Kindergarten – 12.
- Whether on campus, excursions or camps.
- At any time of any day of the year.

Responsibility
Headmaster

Point of Contact
Headmaster/Critical Incident Management Team
What is a critical incident?

The Heights College critical incident management plan applies in the event of a disaster which may cause confusion and stress, thus evoking unusually strong, emotional or psychological reactions amongst the school community.

Critical incidents interfere with the ability of a person to function to their normal capacity.

Events defined as “critical incidents” include:

- The death of a student or member of staff in tragic circumstances; e.g. as the result of an accident, murder or suicide;
- A natural disaster which destroys all or part of the College. This includes such events as flood, fire, earthquake, etc;
- A major mishap on an excursion;
- A bus accident/road accident;
- A bomb threat;
- The presence of a dangerous person on the campus, resulting in a lockdown;
- A major crisis which happens beyond the College but has significant impact on College community members.

Related Documents

Refer to the following documents for procedures to be followed while a specific event is unfolding:

- Lockdown Policy
- Bomb Threat Policy
- Fire and Emergency Evacuation Policy

Rationale

The College recognises the potential for sudden, unexpected, critical events to affect the entire community. This document sets in place a plan, to be implemented in response to such a critical event. It is not possible to predict every potential emergency that may be encountered. The intent of this document is to provide enough information to meet most crisis situations effectively.

The College also recognises that all critical events have the capacity to cause a negative impact on individuals and the College community. The purpose of this policy is to identify the nature of the event, assess the impact of the event to the community and determine the best way to manage the situation. It is also recognised that unless certain events are managed proactively, they could cause long-term damage to the College ministry. Most events which occur, whilst traumatic, will only impact the College for a short period of time. This policy seeks to minimise long term impact that could be detrimental to the College.
Aims of the Critical Incident Policy

A Critical Incident Policy should enable the College community to act in such a way that the trauma following a critical incident is minimised for all those concerned. In particular, the policy should seek to:

- Handle critical events in a Godly way;
- Ensure a supportive, caring response to the critical event;
- Ensure that all staff members are fully aware of the procedure that is to be followed when a critical event occurs;
- Prevent further physical or psychological injury;
- Meet the needs of people for appropriate accurate information;
- Meet the needs of people to grieve, to receive counsel and to be comforted properly;
- Protect the College and the people within it from damaging public misunderstandings;
- Designate roles key people are to follow;
- Return to normality as soon as possible.

Procedure

A ‘critical incident’ may be deemed so only by the Headmaster or by the Headmaster’s delegate if the Headmaster is absent. Care must be taken to avoid unauthorized statements being made concerning critical events as this might affect the College’s liability.

In crisis situations, it is not uncommon for initial information to include erroneous assumptions and misinformation. It may be needed to revise one’s first response at a moment’s notice.

1. Emergency services should be phoned immediately by personnel at the scene, and the facts of the event should then be communicated immediately to the Headmaster or the Headmaster’s delegate.
2. The Headmaster or Headmaster’s delegate should determine if all appropriate emergency services have been contacted, and phone emergency services if necessary.
3. Parents of students injured/hospitalised should be contacted by the Headmaster, School Counsellor or member of the College Leadership Team as appropriate.
4. The Headmaster should convene a Critical Incident Team as soon as possible, and the Headmaster should appoint, for the current incident only, a Critical Incident Team Coordinator from those present. The Critical Incident Team will include at least:
   - Headmaster
   - College Counsellor
   - Head of Primary
   - Middle School Coordinator
• Senior School Coordinator
• Business Manager (who is also responsible for Work, Health and Safety).

The Headmaster may add other staff to the Critical Incident Team if he/she deems it appropriate to meet the needs of the incident. Each team member needs to be assigned a specific role.

5. Tell office staff not to repeat or give out information within or outside the college until instructed to do so by the Headmaster. Prepare a statement for telephone inquiries directed to office staff.

6. The Chairman of the Board should be contacted by the Headmaster.

7. Verify the reported incident with the police. Verify with police the timing of notification to family and the school if there has been a death. This notification will be made by police and it is critical that no announcements are made by the school until the families of victims of any incident are notified.

8. Verify with police who the school-police liaison person is and provide 24-hour contact details.

9. Prepare a formal statement to use for initial notification to the whole school. Include minimal details and note that additional information will be forthcoming.

10. A full staff meeting should be called by the Headmaster before the College resumes functions. A nominated duty staff will supervise students. The purpose of the staff meeting will be to:

• call the staff to prayer;
• communicate the facts of the event accurately to counter any rumours;
• outline the information which teachers can pass on to students;
• direct staff to counselling services where needed.

11. Counselling rooms should be set up in the Learning and Leadership Centre or other rooms as needed. Christian counsellors from the community, other Christian schools or churches may be requested to assist.

12. A whole or part school assembly may be called by the Headmaster to:

• lead the College community in prayer;
• communicate the facts of the event as appropriate;
• acknowledge the feelings that people have and will have to deal with in the wake of the incident;
• direct students to counselling services as appropriate.

_N.B. Gather and inform closest student friends of the deceased or injured BEFORE any general announcement, and AFTER parents/families have been notified._

13. An extended pastoral care or class period may be organised to allow teachers and other appropriate personnel to give appropriate information and directions and work through issues with students.

14. When appropriate, the Critical Incident Team will:
• Restore the College to routine – most students and teachers will return to normal classes; encourage teachers to allow students to talk about issues surrounding the incident if it becomes obviously necessary. Otherwise, teachers should resume, as far as possible, a normal teaching program;
• Students ‘at risk’ should be identified by staff and directed to counselling as appropriate.

15. The Critical Incident Team should debrief after the end of the first school day and future strategies should be discussed.
16. Request staff to meet 30 minutes early next morning to update them on any additional information, review procedures and debrief.
17. A 24-hour access “hotline” should be established for parents and students if appropriate.
18. The Critical Incident Team will:
  • Identify and evaluate all immediate issues resulting from the event;
  • Manage all issues resulting from the event, including student concerns or students ‘at risk’.
19. Provided that the privacy of members of the college community is not infringed, send home a letter at the end of the day/crisis outlining what has occurred and what has been done.
20. Supply the media with a fact sheet on the school and district as well as on the crisis outcome. This will be done in consultation with the College Chairman.

Evaluation

As soon as possible after the College returns to normal routine, the Critical Incident Team will:

• Evaluate the effectiveness of the College’s response to the critical incident;
• Identify, plan and oversee any training that may be required to improve the College’s response to a critical incident;
• Modify the Critical Incident Policy to correct problems and weaknesses.

The Critical Incident Team Co-ordinator appointed by the Headmaster will take responsibility for the evaluation process, and will oversee the training and the modification of the Critical Incident Policy if required.

Training

Critical incident training shall be provided for staff at the commencement of each school year. Training shall include at least the following:

• Awareness training for the details of the policy;
• A ‘walk-through’ of a possible critical incident scenario.
The purpose of the walk-through is to allow staff to tackle a hypothetical incident, and become familiar with their roles and responsibilities as well as to then identify and correct problems and weaknesses, both with the policy and its execution.

Suggested procedure:

- A specific critical incident scenario shall be identified and described;
- The walk-through shall proceed in chronological order from the start of the incident;
- A secretary shall record the plans and action of staff members as the 'incident' unfolds;
- At each stage, staff members, in their designated roles identified in the Critical Incident Plan, will identify and describe the actions and tasks they would undertake;
- Following the walk-through, the College Leadership Team shall evaluate the effectiveness of the response to the incident, and shall identify and implement any policy changes or further training which may be required.
APPENDIX 1

Crisis Management Checklist

First 24 Hours

1. First few minutes
   - Stop and think – appearing calm helps give a sense of control to others.
   - Read emergency procedures to remind yourself of what needs to be done.

2. Find out facts.

3. Establish a Management Plan.
   - Contact College Board Chairman and appropriate personnel.
   - Convene a meeting immediately with the College Executive/Leadership Team and convene a Critical Incident Team.
   - Determine whether additional support and advice is needed.

4. Inform directly affected personnel before any general announcement, and AFTER parents have been notified.

5. If the student is an Overseas student the College requires:
   a. 24 hour access to contact details for all students and their families (for schools with overseas students this will also include agents, homestay families, carers, consular staff, embassies and interpreting services if necessary)
   b. 24 hour access to contact details for all relevant staff members needed in the event of a critical incident e.g. school counsellor, welfare officer, legal services, school security
   c. The College should also contact DIAC and inform them of the incident.
   d. If the student is in hospital for some time, the College needs to maintain contact with the student and their family.
      - Support and assistance for the student and family
      - Depending on the condition of the student, the school could provide school work for the student to enable them to remain in touch with school activities
      - Discuss with the family any required changes to the enrolment of the student e.g. suspension or cancellation of enrolment and make any changes required on PRISMS
6. Inform all staff
   • Facts of incidents
   • Outline management plan.
   • Suggest sources of personal support for staff.

7. Inform all students
   • Assemble all students and outline pertinent facts.
   • Provide information regarding support available.

8. Inform parents by telephone or visit if student is directly affected.
   • Provide facts to parent body via newsletter or separate letter and outline school’s response.
   • Indicate possible reactions children may experience.
   • Suggest sources of help for families.
   • Establish a 24 hour phone message answering service to callers who wish to access basic information which needs to be disseminated, e.g. phone numbers of relevant personnel to contact, status of conditions etc.
   • If all school phone systems are out, the Leadership team would each ring six staff members within their sub-school, who will in turn ring six staff members or parents, etc. Alternatively, a brief could be broadcast on the local radio stations.

9. Set up recovery room in school
   • Support personnel, refreshments, comfortable chairs
   • Allow private space for several days

10. The Headmaster or his delegate is the only staff member to talk to the media.

**48-72 hours after incident**

1. Restore College to regular routine.
   • Provide regular, updated information to staff.
   • Provide a balance between structure and normal functioning and flexibility required by staff and students unable to return to normal routines.

2. Support those more directly involved
   • Provide opportunities for staff and students to express their feelings and reactions
   • Support staff to be available
• Provide referral information

3. Home/School Link
   • Encourage two-way communication between home and school.
   • Update parents by newsletter or meeting.

First Month

1. Hold meeting of affected staff
   • Encourage staff to express and share feelings and identify issues requiring further action

2. Update College staff
   • Provide regular updates on matters relating to the incident.
   • Encourage the sharing of ideas that might assist in the recovery of the College community.

3. Consider memorial options.

4. Convene a meeting of parents
   • Encourage parents to express feelings and concerns about their child’s welfare and help them understand reactions to a crisis.

Long Term

1. Monitor members of the College community
   • Everyone in the school community may be affected. The memory of past losses may be triggered by the crisis. Encourage those affected to seek support/professional assistance.
   • Monitor stress levels.

2. Training and development needs.


4. Anniversaries.

5. Inquests and legal proceedings.
   • Seek legal advice if College staff are required to give evidence in legal proceedings.
APPENDIX 2

Operational Checklist

1. The Headmaster is told or confirms the facts about the incident:
   - He ensures appropriate Emergency Services have been contacted.

2. The Headmaster, as overall co-ordinator, prepares a statement for use with media, staff, parents and students.

3. Emergency procedures are started:
   - Headmaster calls a meeting of the Critical Incident Team and appoints one of the members as Critical Incident Team Co-ordinator.
   - Headmaster calls a meeting of whole staff, including relevant ancillary.
   - Headmaster calls a meeting of whole school to give early, accurate report.
   - Students and Pastoral Care teachers meet as required.
   - School Board is informed.
   - The Critical Incident Team meets with representatives of community support agencies.

4. Staff
   - Staff are replaced if required.
   - Selected staff rostered for support duty.
   - Duty Roster is strengthened if necessary.
   - Affected students are directed to counseling.
   - Arrangements are made for students needing to go home.
   - Take note of all ‘at risk’ students.
   - Ensure students are protected from the media.

5. At the end of Day One:
   - Debriefing opportunity available to all staff
   - Critical Incident Team to meet to plan longer term procedures
   - Counselling and information make available after normal school hours
APPENDIX 3

Staff Roles

Headmaster

- Initiates and supervises the Critical Incident Policy.
- Determines immediate course of action depending on circumstances.
- Gathers factual information on the crisis.
- Arranges for contact with emergency services if required.
- Appoints a Critical Incident Team and Critical Incident Team Co-ordinator.
- Notifies Chairman of the College Board.
- Arranges and chairs a brief meeting of College Leadership Team and Critical Incident Team (as a matter of urgency) to consider implementation of action plan.
- Formulates a statement of fact for staff, students and office receptionists.
- Arranges and chairs a meeting of all staff to inform them of the situation and to advise re which action should be taken.
- Talk to whole school assembly if appropriate.
- Contact parents of students directly involved.
- Arrange for the College solicitor and Insurance Company to be notified.
- Visit site of incident if appropriate or arrange for a member of the Critical Incident Team to visit if necessary. This may be done by the College Chairman.

As the only school contact, the Headmaster will:

(a) Present the College’s point of view and communicate the key messages.
(b) Address the facts in an open and co-operative manner, ensuring that the College’s story is clearly presented.
(c) Influence and manage perceptions.
(d) Where the issue has potential to cause long-term damage to the College, seek media communications and legal advice to assist in formulating a response and management plan.
(e) Be accessible, co-operative and in control.
(f) Be the face of the College.
(g) Ensure that key stakeholders are briefed prior to (if possible) media involvement.
(h) Cultivate and call on expert allies.
(i) Record all events and manage the debrief.
(j) Ensure there is adequate prayer covering throughout the crisis.

Critical Incident Team

- Obtain a clear explanation of the known facts
- Identify the immediate support resources available
- Discuss needs for additional resources e.g. extra counsellors.
- Nominate suitable Counselling rooms within the College (N.B. Sick Bay is not appropriate for distressed and grieving students).
• Identify those members of the College community most closely involved.
• Make arrangements for informing the staff, student body, College Board etc as appropriate.
• Make decisions about the appropriate manner of contact with the distressed family and offer support.
• Provide additional guidelines for the staff about what information to give students, how to handle reactions (e.g. to particularly traumatic experiences or to any media coverage) and the referral of distressed students to counseling.
• Arrange debriefing at end of day for staff if required.

Critical Incident Team Co-ordinator

The Critical Incident Team Co-ordinator appointed by the Headmaster will be responsible for the co-ordination of support to students and/or staff or other persons, as appropriate:

• He/she will be assisted by the Head of Primary School, Middle and Senior School Coordinators, Counsellors, Year Level Coordinators, staff and qualified outside agencies as required.
• Chair meeting with Critical Incident Team and community health representatives if appropriate.
• Supervise welfare aspects of the Critical Incident Policy.
• Arrange for the set up of the Counselling Rooms identified.
• Ensure the location of Counselling Rooms is communicated to all staff.
• If required, arrange for the set up of a staff Recovery Room, including refreshments.
• Record ‘at risk’ students nominated by the Critical Incident Team and/or Pastoral Care teachers, Class teachers or Year Level Coordinators – initially those most directly involved in the incident.
• Visit site of incident if appropriate.

Business Manager

The Business Manager will stand by for the Headmaster in his absence.

• Liaise with Headmaster and the Critical Incident Team.
• Maintain administration.
• Re-organise staff as required.
• Liaise frequently with Office Receptionists.
• Ensure there is a prepared statement from the Headmaster.
• Liaise with ancillary staff as required.
• Arrange for parents to be contacted as required.
Counsellor

- Liaise directly with the Co-ordinator of the Critical Incident Team.
- Determine staffing needs at the Counselling Rooms with the Critical Incident Team and to request staff from the Head of school accordingly (specifically staff trained in critical incident stress debriefing and grief and loss counseling).
- Counselling and co-ordinating activities, where required.
- Contact Community Health where required to inform them of the crisis and if appropriate, arrange for them to visit the College to discuss needs/assist in management of the situation.
- Assist other community support services in arranging long-term service provision to individuals (both students and staff) and families.
- Work with community health staff in assessing readiness of students involved in returning to school.
- Contact other counsellors for support, if necessary.

Staff

- A statement of fact may be provided for you to read to students.
- Remain calm.
- Dispel rumours and discourage speculation.
- Model an appropriate response to the crisis.
- Identify students at risk.
- Be available to students or refer to counseling as considered necessary. Record names of all students at risk. (N.B. Students should be taken to a Counselling Room where staff are available to talk with and reassure them).
- Provide activities, through art, music and writing, to reduce stress and express emotions; and, as much as possible, ensure that students feel secure and calm.
- Record of all 'at risk' students identified during the day to be returned to Critical Incident Team Co-ordinator.
- Talk with Critical Incident Team to consider management of crisis in short and long term.

Ancillary Staff

- Briefed by a member of the Critical Incident Team shortly after the statement of fact is ready.
Office Receptionists

- Refer all media enquiries to the Headmaster.
- Answer parent enquiries by reference to the prepared statement.
- Assure enquirers that school is proceeding normally, that students should come and/or stay.
- Thank people who offer to help, taking contact numbers if the offer needs to be taken up.

Other Office Staff

- Continue with routine duties and be prepared to assist as required, to handle personal enquiries.
# APPENDIX 4

## List of Counsellors

<table>
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<tr>
<th>COUNSELLOR’S NAME</th>
<th>EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS</th>
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| Kaye **HEAD** – Counsellor in training | Heights College: Ph. 0749361076  
Mob. 0427288941 |
| Jill **MAGNUSSEN** | Home: 0749287348 |
| Natalie **HISLOP-ESTERHUYSSEN** - Psychologist | Heights College: Ph. 0749361076  
Hm. 0749250730 |
| Jenny **FALLS** (Gladstone) | Home: 0749750474  
Mob. 0416257309 |
| Leonie **TAYLOR** (The Caves) | Home: 0749342991  
Mob. 0413751565 |
| Jackie **CREIGHTON** (Gladstone) | Home: 0749793070  
Mob. 0432310934 |
| Sue **HAWKINS** (Gladstone) | Church of Christ: Ph. 0749769393 |
| Dr David **GENTLE** - Psychologist | Home: 0749267655  
Mob. 0417926758 |
| Stacey **JERNETSKI** (Gladstone) | Church of Christ: Ph. 0749769393 |
| Captain Peter McGuigan | Corps Officer – Salvation Army – 0423299327 |
| Lieutenant Tara McGuigan | Corps Officer – Salvation Army – 0403158480 |
| Envoy Heather Moulder | Salvation Army – 0401781795 |
| Ian Jones | Welfare Officer – Salvation Army – 0412125208 |
| Maggie Dixon | Lifeline – 4930 7300 / 0418 794961 |
| Sam Barkworth | Lifeline – 4930 7300 |
| Neville Williams | Lifeline – 4930 7300 |