

GUIDELINES

CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE

Responsibility of:	School Support Services	DET File: FILE2017/1563
Effective Date:	October 2017	EDOC2017/65453
Next Review Date:	October 2020	Version Number: 1.0
Target Audience:	Regional Staff/ School Community/ Principals	

This document should be read in conjunction with the [Emergency Management-School Preparedness Policy](#) and the [Emergency Management: Plans for Schools Guidelines](#).

1. INTRODUCTION

The effective and efficient management of critical incidents is vital to the safety and wellbeing of students, staff and the school community. It is particularly important to recognise and engage with those suffering trauma and distress as the result of a critical incident.

Critical incidents may occur on or off school grounds and may involve one or more members of the school community. This document outlines the guidelines for managing a critical incident at the school, regional and departmental level.

2. DEFINITIONS

Corporate staff (for example, the Senior School Counsellor or Senior School Psychologist) refers to Department of Education employees who provide essential support functions to schools but whom are not employed by regions.

Critical incident means an event that creates significant danger, risk or likelihood of traumatic effects, and creates a situation where students, staff and the school community experience trauma, feel unsafe, vulnerable and/or under stress. Critical incidents may include, but are not limited to:

- the death/injury of a student, staff member and/or member of the school community
- the serious assault of a student, staff member and/or member of the school community
- the suicide of a student, staff member and/or member of the school community
- natural events such as cyclones, fires or floods

Human Resources refers to the Department of Education Human Resources business unit.

Newsflashes are succinct briefings that provide critical information to the department's Chief Executive and the Minister's office. The department's Corporate Communications unit and the Deputy Chief Executive School Education are also notified of information through this process.

NT WorkSafe is a division under the Department of Attorney-General and Justice responsible for assisting businesses and workers understand their obligations under work health and safety, dangerous goods, electrical safety, and rehabilitation and workers compensation in the Northern Territory.

Quality Education and Care NT (QECNT) refers to the NT regulatory authority responsible for administering the [Education and Care Services \(National Uniform Legislation\) Act and Regulations](#).

Regional staff refers to Department of Education employees based in different offices across the Northern Territory (Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs).

School community means the teaching staff, parents, students and other persons who have a direct involvement or interest in the school.

School staff includes any person responsible for the operations or education services at a school. This can include contractors, visitors or volunteers.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Principals are responsible for:

- ensuring the safety of students and school staff in the immediate management of a critical incident
- immediately or when first practicable, informing the Regional Director (or other senior departmental staff member if Regional Director is unavailable) of the occurrence of a critical incident
- immediately or when first practicable, informing NT WorkSafe of a critical incident involving a serious injury or the death of students or school staff. A [WHS Incident Report form](#) must be completed within 24 hours of an incident occurring
- if the school includes a preschool, informing QECNT within 24 hours if an incident has occurred at the preschool or involves a child enrolled at a preschool
- working with the Regional Director and Corporate Communications to manage communications with the school and wider community during a critical incident
- working with the Regional Director and regional staff to ensure support is available to students and school staff during a critical incident
- conducting a debrief with school staff (Regional Director and regional staff support to be sought, as required)
- monitoring student and school staff wellbeing following a critical incident and providing ongoing wellbeing support, as required.

Regional Directors are responsible for:

- coordinating the response to a critical incident situation, upon notification of a critical incident by the principal.
- providing timely and accurate advice to their Executive Director regarding a critical incident
- allocating appropriate regional staff such as school counsellors to support a school during a critical incident
- working with the principal and Corporate Communications to manage communications with the school and wider community during a critical incident
- preparing a newsflash for executive level approval (newsflashes should be sent to the minister's office within four hours of a critical incident stabilising)
- conducting a debrief with regional staff after a critical incident
- ensuring ongoing wellbeing support for the school principal and regional staff, as required.

Regional staff (for example, a Regional Manager Student Support or a school counsellor) are responsible for:

- providing required support to schools during a critical incident, as directed by Regional Directors.

Corporate Communications is responsible for:

- working alongside the Regional Director and principal to ensure effective communication management across the school and wider community
- liaising with outside agencies such as Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services or Territory Families regarding communications, as required.

Human Resources is responsible for:

- providing support to schools and regional staff regarding any human resources and/or wellbeing issues, as required.
- assisting school staff who require access to wellbeing support through Employee Assistance Program services in their region

Executive Directors are responsible for:

- providing accurate and timely advice to the Deputy Chief Executive School Education regarding a critical incident
- on request from Regional Directors, arranging for additional support for regional staff responding to a critical incident. This additional support may be in the form of corporate staff.
- checking in with and ensuring ongoing wellbeing support for Regional Directors, as required.

The Deputy Chief Executive School Education is responsible for:

- providing accurate and timely advice to the Chief Executive regarding a critical incident.

The Chief Executive is responsible for:

- providing accurate and timely advice to the Minister for Education, as necessary, regarding critical incidents.

All staff are responsible for:

- remaining alert to signs of distress or trauma in colleagues who have been involved in critical incidents and seeking assistance, as required (refer Supporting Resources).

4. GUIDELINES/PROCEDURES

WHEN A CRITICAL INCIDENT OCCURS

- Where a critical incident occurs in a school, the principal will ensure the immediate safety of students and school staff.
- When practicable, the principal will inform the Regional Director (or other senior departmental staff member if the Regional Director is unavailable) of the critical incident, from where the Regional Director will take management of the situation.
- When practicable, the Regional Director must advise the Executive Director about the critical incident (refer Roles and Responsibilities for further information about reporting requirements).
- The Regional Director will allocate appropriate regional staff, for example, school counsellors, to a school to provide support required for a specific critical incident.

DURING A CRITICAL INCIDENT

- Throughout the critical incident communications must be managed between the Regional Director, Corporate Communications and the principal. External agencies such as Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services or Territory Families may need to be involved, and a newsflash **must** be produced within four hours of a critical incident stabilising.
- The principal and Regional Director must monitor support provided to students and school staff during a critical incident. The Regional Director will request additional support from the Executive Director, if required.

AFTER A CRITICAL INCIDENT

- The principal should coordinate a debriefing session with school staff after a critical incident, accessing support from the Regional Director and/or regional staff, as required. This debriefing should ideally occur within 24-72 hours after an incident.
- Debriefing sessions should also be held at the regional staff level (refer Roles and Responsibilities).
- The option for wellbeing support for students, school and regional staff must be communicated widely following a critical incident. At the student level, this may

involve letters to parents, a newsletter comment or information prepared by regional counsellors.

- The principal must monitor students and school staff in the weeks following a critical incident for signs of distress or trauma (refer Supporting Resources). Not all reactions to trauma will be the same, so tailored support should be offered according to the person affected.
- The Regional Director will check in with the principal following a critical incident and a school's debriefing session. This may be an ongoing commitment.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix A-Critical Incident Guidelines Flowchart (Principal and Regional Director roles)

6. SUPPORTING RESOURCES

[Trauma factsheet](#)

[Trauma and Children](#)

7. RELATED POLICY, LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

Department of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Newsflash guidelines• Recording and Reporting Student Injuries guidelines and procedures
Northern Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education Act• Education Regulations• Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act• Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Regulations• Information Sharing Guidelines

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Trauma factsheet – Employee Assistance Services Australia (EASA)

Trauma and Children – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (Phoenix Australia)

Appendix A-Critical Incident Response Guidelines flowchart

