St James School Crisis Management Policy

A crisis is an event which can cause disruption, create significant danger or risk and traumatically affect individuals within the organisation.

A crisis can include:

Fire, bomb, threat, explosion, gas or chemical hazard, flood, industrial or transport accident, earthquake, death of a student or staff member, students or staff being taken hostage, destruction of the whole or part of the school, break in accompanied by major vandalism, students/staff lost or injured on an excursion, students/staff witnessing serious injury or death, assault on a teacher or student, child sexual assault, a natural or other major crisis in the community, unfavourable media attention, extremes of temperature. For the most part people are unprepared for these situations yet, yet the support of family, friends, church and the community is vital.

Crisis Management Team:

The team will include the School Principal, School Executive, the Parish Priest, a member of the local community health if available. All media requests and release of information are to be referred to the School.

Principal:

N.B. The School Principal needs to verify the information about the event. The duties of the Committee will include: • Designation a team leader experienced in crisis work. • Adequate assessment of hazards and situations which may require emergency action. • Analysis of requirements to address these hazards. • Establishment of liaison with all relevant emergency services.

• Co-coordinating the strategy to be implemented.
• Contacting parents/families of injured/deceased to express school’s sympathy.

• After consultation with the family, if necessary/feasible develop documented information for the staff.

• Decide how, when, what is to disseminated to staff and students.

• Allocating tasks to staff.

• Planning the necessary changes to timetable/yard duty.

• Deciding if an opportunity for a prayer should be made available, for students and staff who wish to attend.

• Contacting a person with first aid expertise to be available in case of severe physical stress reactions.

• Arranging staff development activities, where necessary.

• Setting aside a support centre, with refreshments during the day, for distressed students.

• Composing and sending a letter to parents, briefly stating the event and providing information on signs of distress or possible changes in behaviour, the school’s plan and where to come for help.

• Organisation of practice drills to test the plan e.g. fire drill.

• Regular review of the management plan. Working with Staff The Crisis Committee having prepared the information they wish to give the staff should call a staff meeting as soon as possible. All staff should be informed at the same time so that they all have the same information. Supervision of students may prevent all staff being together.

• Staff needs to be given a little time for their expressions of feelings. • A briefing of possible grief reactions of students should be given.

• Staff needs to be advised of the school’s management plan and the facilities available for students.

• Support resources for staff need to be mentioned.

• Updates to staff on the current situation during the day are essential. • Debriefing at the end of the day is critical.
• Staff close to the person concerned, or those who have personally experienced a similar situation may need special support.

• Shock reactions of staff may occur.

• Monitoring the workloads of caregivers is important.

Working with Students:

• Students need a safe environment for exploration of their grief.

• The prepared statement shared with students needs to be brief, factual and include support facilities available.

• All students need to be advised SIMULTANEOUSLY in class groups.

• ANNOUNCEMENTS AT MASS, ASSEMBLIES SHOULD BE AVOIDED.

• Close friends of those involved in the crisis need to be identified by staff and given individual counselling immediately.

• Parents of close friends should be contacted personally (some these students may need to be with their parents)

• Inability to answer student’s questions is normal; staff should be honest and seek help on the appropriate response.

• Class discussion needs to be considered that each student will have different ways of dealing with feelings and coping with it.

Parents:

It might be necessary to send home a letter to parents the first day, advising them of the incident. Parents need to be aware of behavioural changes they may notice, be encouraged to provide support and to seek help. Those involved in a crisis will play various roles and encounter different experiences. These people are most likely to need assistance.

They may include:

• People directly exposed to incidents.

• Relatives and friends • Helpers or recovery personnel.
• Community and people indirectly involved.

**Classroom Strategies:**

• As a teacher don’t be afraid to show emotion to the children. A controlled silence from you is more difficult for them to cope with than open distress, because they don’t know what to do with their feelings. Your emotions confirm them and make it possible for them to grieve.

• You can show the children that it is Ok to cry, be sad, laugh, be angry, forget the person temporarily, and use the children’s belongings. This makes the death more manageable for the child.

• Give an honest explanation of why you are upset, eg. I feel sad that…died and that’s why I’m crying NOT I have an eyelash in my eye.

• Answer all questions truthfully. If you don’t answer all questions the child may feel left out and confused.

• Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know.”

• Don’t make up an answer if you don’t know. If your children hear at a later date (day, month, year) that it’s untrue they may not believe anything they are told about death.

• Don’t put off questions by telling them they are too young. Simplify your answer instead.

• Avoid euphemisms- they are too easily misunderstood. Eg. Don’t say the person went away, that death is the same as sleeping ...

• Be Careful saying that sickness causes death. Be specific “The person died of Cancer.” Explain the difference between terminal and nonterminal illnesses.

• Don’t mix religion with death. The person was not taken because God wanted him/her in heaven, the person died because s/he had (a car accident).

**Other Things to Note:**

Grief exaggerates positive and negative feelings and consequently a child may feel guilt or responsibility for the death. Reassure the children that fighting or having negative feelings did not cause the death. eg idolisation, I hate you, I wish you were dead. A child may regress temporarily both emotionally and physically
(tantrums, loss of manual skills, dependency, aggressive behaviour) especially if they don’t express their feelings. Younger children often find it easier to “grieve at a distance.” They might show little emotion about the death, but tremendous sympathy for characters in a book, but overreact to a broken shoelace or lost tie.

**Guidelines for a Recovery Timetable:**

The successful management of a crisis depends on the school taking appropriate action and providing support during and after the critical. With in 24hrs:

- Gather the facts.
- Ensure safety and welfare of staff and students and arrange first aid if necessary.
- Where possible notify the time and place of the debriefing to all relevant persons.
- Manage the media.
- Set up a recovery room.
- Keep the staff parents and students informed. Within 48-72 hrs:
  - Arrange counselling as needed.
  - Provide opportunities for staff to talk about the incident.
  - Provide support to staff and helpers.
  - Debrief all relevant persons.
  - Restore normal functioning as soon as possible.
- Keep parents informed. Within the first month:
  - Arrange a memorial service if appropriate.
  - Encourage parents to participate in meeting to discuss student’s welfare.
  - Identify behavioural changes and the possibility of post traumatic stress disorder and refer to Macksville Health Centre for specialist help.
  - Monitor progress of hospitalised staff or students.
  - Monitor mental and physical health of all helpers.
In the Longer Term:


- Provide support if needed.

- Consider including grief as a topic in the P.D.H. & P.E. In the Long Term (more than 12 months):
  
  - Plan for and be sensitive to the disturbing influences of anniversaries, inquests and legal proceedings.
  
  - Access specialist support if needed. Evaluation of Management Plan After a crisis a meeting of students and local community representatives should be held to evaluate the effectiveness of the management plan to make necessary modifications.