



NEWCASTLE
GRAMMAR
SCHOOL

Critical Incident Policy

Policy Number (PN): 3.6.2.3.5

Last Revised: August 2024



Current NGS Policies & Procedures

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Policy Revised:

October 2021 – Formatting

August 2024 – Formatting, update to Action Plan and CIMT contact list

Review: August 2025

1. Introduction

This document is designed to act as a guide should a critical incident occur either within the School or within the School Community. Newcastle Grammar School is committed to complying with our WorkSafe requirements.

1.1 Purpose and Scope

A critical incident is an emergency situation that usually involves an abnormal and sudden occurrence. A critical incident may be defined as a situation that has an adverse emotional effect on all or some of the School Community. The incident may occur at the School or through a related School-based activity or circumstance. Critical incidents are a specific type of business continuity disruption event, that not only usually disrupt normal School operations and activities, they also pose immediate and significant danger to life, property and/or the environment.

Potential critical incidents may include, but are not limited to:

- Critical injury or death of a student or member of staff.

- Student or staff suicide.
- The destruction of the whole or part of the School.
- A break-in or major vandalism.
- An accident on an excursion or during sport.
- Incidents involving violence against students/staff (including the use of weapons).
- Students or staff witnessing serious injury or death.
- Terminal illness of a member of the School Community.
- Sudden loss of a senior member of staff (e.g. the Head of School).
- Allegations of sexual abuse/assault involving a member of the School Community that have become common knowledge.
- Unusual and unfavourable media attention for the School or groups within the School.
- A natural, severe weather event or other major disaster within the wider Community.
- Students or parents involved in an overseas incident (e.g. hijacking, war).
- School invasion.

This Policy and its Procedures apply to all staff, volunteers and contractors at the school. In as far as it is practicably possible Newcastle Grammar School seeks to prevent critical incidents from occurring; and in the event of a critical incident, to minimise the potential impact.

A critical incident involving the computer network will be managed with the *IT Critical Incident Policy*.

A critical incident involving an International Student will be managed by the Critical Incident Team following the guidelines in the *Critical Incident Policy*, along with the support team in place for assisting and supporting each International Student enrolled at the School, and in conjunction with our *Overseas Students Policy*. The PA to the Head of School will maintain a written record of any critical incident and remedial action taken for at least two (2) years after the overseas student ceases to be an accepted student.

1.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Newcastle Grammar School has established a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT - see contact list in APPENDIX) whose responsibility it is to:

- lead the response to emergency situations
- make an initial assessment of the support required by any affected individuals or groups of individuals within the School
- develop an initial Critical Incident Management Plan and identify active relevant responses

- determine and implement the most appropriate communications strategy to manage a given situation
- ensure that all staff receive appropriate briefings to ensure that they can carry out their roles in any Critical Incident Management Plan
- ensure staff and student welfare and support
- refine the Critical Incident Management Plan as required where a situation is ongoing.

Employee's Responsibilities

All employees must follow directions provided to them by the CIMT and other staff members acting at their direction.

All workers are responsible to ensure:

- participation in critical incident response training as required
- cooperation in carrying out their duties in an emergency situation
- prompt action is taken to secure or isolate any hazardous situation in an emergency if this can be done so without placing themselves or other workers at risk
- immediately report any critical incident to a member of the School Executive Team.

2. Key Legislation

Work Health and Safety Act 2011

3. Related Policies

Work Health & Safety Policy

IT Critical Incident Policy

Overseas Students Policy

Emergency Evacuation and Lockdown Policy

WHS Risk Management Policy

4. Policy Statement

Newcastle Grammar School is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for all our workers, students, visitors and guests. Given the diverse nature of possible critical incidents and the

variance of potential impacts on members of the School community, it is not possible to establish a single response strategy for all situations. In these circumstances it is our policy to:

- provide pastoral support to all students and staff where they are experiencing, or may be at risk of experiencing, emotional distress in the aftermath of a traumatic event
- presume that a critical incident will occur within the School community and make appropriate preparations to ensure that the School is in the best possible position to respond when the event takes place
- establish a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) that is trained to respond to emergency situations and to manage the response to traumatic events
- ensure that the Critical Incident Action Plan Checklist is clearly communicated to staff and members of the School community
- liaise with relevant organisations, external to the School, that may also be involved in responding to a situation
- ensure that all staff receive appropriate briefings to ensure that they can carry out their roles in any Critical Incident Action Plan.

By identifying potential critical incident situations, making appropriate risk assessments, implementing preventative measures and planning an appropriate response, Newcastle Grammar School seeks to manage and control such situations so as to ensure, that in the event they do occur, the most appropriate assistance is available and rendered in a timely and considered manner.

5. Procedures

5.1 Risk Assessment

Newcastle Grammar School has developed a Risk Management Policy and Procedures based on the International Standard ISO 31000:2018. Newcastle Grammar School's Work Health and Safety Program sets out our risk assessment procedures for safety hazards. Our WHS framework is based on the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW).

As far as practicably possible we seek to prevent critical incidents from occurring and to minimise the potential impact of these events. To this end, we have developed policies and procedures that are specifically targeted towards prevention of critical incidents.

Using our risk assessment procedures, we identify critical incidents that we believe may potentially occur, assess the risks relating to these incidents in terms of the likelihood of the incident occurring and the potential consequences should the incident in fact occur, and develop controls and

responses based upon our risk assessments. All risk assessments with respect to critical incidents are recorded in Assurance. These are subject to regular review and may change from time to time.

5.2 Three Stage Critical Incident Response Process

It is not always possible to predict the extent, nature and complexity of a critical incident, nor is it always possible to accurately predict the most appropriate response. The following stages of response are a general guide in organisation and should not be interpreted as being prescriptive.

The three stages of response are:

Stage 1: Emergency Response

This is the immediate emergency response to a disruption to the normal day to day routine of the School, which by its very nature necessitates the removal or protection of people and property from immediate harm. Detailed procedures in response to an emergency are documented in the *Evacuation Procedures* and *Lockdown Procedures*. In the event of a critical incident, the Head of School will delegate tasks to the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT). The CIMT is responsible for assisting the Head of School in responding to and managing the critical incident.

Depending on the nature of the critical incident, the composition of the CIMT may vary. Following a critical incident event, clear and effective communication is critical to ensure effective risk mitigation and recovery. It is the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)'s responsibility to determine and implement the most appropriate communications strategy in any particular set of circumstances.

Establish a Management Plan (Refer to Action Plan in APPENDIX)

- Make an initial assessment of an incident and support any individuals involved in the initial emergency response.
- Convene members of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) appropriate to the incident.
- Allocate a phone extension and a member of the Team to be responsible for responding to and making any necessary phone calls.
- Determine what additional welfare and support is needed and organise as deemed necessary.
- Collect accurate information from reliable sources as soon as possible; and when possible complete an Incident Report Form.
- Corroborate information from a second reliable source.
- Consult with appropriate individuals (eg a family) to determine how much information is to be shared.

- Contact families until all are informed.
- If appropriate, contact parents for help with contacting members of the School community.
- Contact Newcastle Police ensuring they are aware of the incident.
- Activate response plans.
- Allocate a member of the CIMT to be responsible for follow-up contact with staff, students, parents involved in or directly affected by the Critical Incident.

Stage 2: Short Term Response (Continuity)

The short term response commences once the initial emergency response (if any) has been completed. The short term response involves re-establishing minimum acceptable levels of the day to day operational routines, procedures and resources to ensure that Newcastle Grammar School continues to meet its critical operational objectives.

Whilst each critical incident and/or traumatic event will have its own unique circumstances and management issues, the following basic guidelines apply when formulating and implementing a Critical Incident Management Plan.

It is important to note that these steps do not need to be undertaken in order and that one or more of these steps may be in operation simultaneously. Major incidents may require the engagement of external parties to assist in coordinating the School's response. A suite of sample letters and media release templates are available to the CIMT in CompliSpace.

Step 1 – Contact the Head of School (CIMT Leader)

Step 2 – Head of School to delegate to the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

It is critical that CIMT members have each other's contact details entered into their mobile phones to ensure that there are no delays in coordinating the initial CIMT meeting. At the initial CIMT meeting an initial Critical Incident Management Plan will be developed having regard to the steps outlined in this Policy.

Step 3 – Initiate Communications with Relevant People/Authorities

In some circumstances it will be necessary to contact relevant people or authorities, such as the police or other emergency services, to establish the most up to date information relating to the relevant situation as this may have a bearing on the response plan that is to be undertaken.

Step 4 – Establish an Incident Support Team/Support Team Centre (If Required)

In some circumstances it may be necessary to draw on additional personnel/resources and establish a specific incident support team and support team centre. This is particularly important where multiple critical tasks are to be coordinated simultaneously and the situation is ongoing.

Step 5 – Staff Briefing

All School staff should be briefed as to the situation as quickly as possible to ensure that they are able to respond appropriately to any queries raised by students or parents/carers. Depending on the nature of the situation this briefing may be via email, text message or a staff meeting.

To ensure that all staff can be contacted as quickly as possible, a School mobile phone or other facility should be set up with a group contact including each member of staff's mobile phone number. This staff group contact will enable text messages to be disseminated rapidly. An up to date all staff email group should also be established and maintained, to allow more detailed communications to be disseminated as required.

Staff should be aware of their parameters and their rights. Staff should allow discussion about the incident and their reactions. However, be aware of the potential impact and cumulative effect over the course of the day when constantly discussing a critical incident.

Discussion needs to establish what happens to the area (desk/locker) that may now be empty. Personal belongings need to be collected and safeguarded until such time as they are returned to individuals or parents. Inform staff of possible effects on students with advice on how to manage such responses. Provide support for staff including de-briefing by qualified counsellors.

Step 6 – Communicate with Students/Parents and Carers

A communications strategy should be established to ensure clear and accurate communications with both parents/carers and students.

Keep parents informed about:

- the School Management Plan
- the possible reactions of students
- sources of help or assistance for families
- encourage two way communication between parents and staff
- continue to provide support in the Recovery/Support Room.
- home/hospital visits to be arranged if necessary to assist students/staff/parents.

Step 7 – Arrange for Counselling Services

The need for counselling services will be dependent on the nature of the incident and the extent of its impact across the School and the wider community. Where it is necessary to engage external assistance, this will be coordinated through the CIMT.

Step 8 – Refine Critical Incident Management Response Plan

During major ongoing incidents it is likely that the Critical Incident Response Plan will be updated frequently. The CIMT will be responsible for refining the Critical Incident Management Response Plan and communicating relevant information to key stakeholders as required.

Step 9 – Post Event Follow Up

The effects of traumatic events can have long term consequences which require long term monitoring and response. Once the initial Critical Incident Response Plan has been implemented, it is important to monitor and respond to the requirements of the School community over time.

Stage 3: Medium Term and Long Term Response (Stabilisation)

Having re-established minimum acceptable levels of operational routines, procedures and resources to ensure that Newcastle Grammar School continues to meet its critical operational objectives there may be a need to implement procedures that are designed to monitor and maintain ongoing support within the School environment and return operations to normal over a period of time. Long term planning will depend upon the extent, nature and complexity of the critical incident. The following points will need to be considered:

- Organisation of whole School ceremonies or small group ceremonies – Memorial Service, Funeral Service, plaques, sympathy cards etc.
- Continue debriefing staff over following days.
- Allocate a member of the CIMT to be responsible for follow-up contact with staff, students, parents involved in or directly affected by the Critical Incident.
- Provide continuing support for parents of students involved in the incident.
- Follow up identification of long term/unresolved sufferers through the Wellbeing network. Encourage staff to be alert to signs of persistent changes in behaviour of those affected by the incident. Some students may not experience or exhibit reactions until days or weeks after the incident.
- Monitor progress of hospitalised and at-home ill students. Liaise closely with hospital support staff and parents on the needs of these students now and on return to School.

- Monitor the members of staff and students from within the School Community acting in care-giver roles, who may themselves exhibit signs of emotional and physical stress.
- Be alert and sensitive to the potential for the unsettling and at times disturbing impact of anniversaries, inquests and legal proceedings. Special support for those affected may need to be in place at these times.

5.3 Media

The School will coordinate the briefing to the media and restrict access to the grounds/property as appropriate. The Head of School should assume responsibility as spokesperson for the School Community.

- The Head of School should be the sole spokesperson on behalf of the School.
- Comments should not be made before all parents whose children have been involved in the event have been notified of the full circumstances.
- Time should be taken to reflect on the facts relating to an incident and have them clear before an interview is granted. Every endeavour should be made to restrict answers to facts. Do not allow media to elicit details of which you are unsure.
- It is highly likely that an inquiry will follow a traumatic event (school inquiry, coronial inquiry and policy inquiry). Media comments on the public record may have a bearing on proceedings of future inquiries. Any comments should be made judiciously and, if possible, should be free of emotional reactions.
- It is good practice to record all details of interviews granted as soon as they have been completed.
- The Head of School will prepare for any media interviews with some or all members of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) assisting with background knowledge or up-to-date information. Decide on a brief message to be conveyed in the interview, come back to it when possible throughout the interview.
- During media interviews, be on the alert for the question relating to 'how the incident occurred'. A momentary lapse in concentration could give the media the opportunity to question the area of negligence or blame. It is imperative that speculative comments are avoided at all times, as there could be significant legal implications.
- Under the stressful situation that would accompany a critical incident, it would be considered appropriate for the Head of School to protect students from unwarranted interviews by members of the media.
- There is always the potential that even though access to students is denied on School premises the media could make contact with students as they leave School or before they

enter School premises on the following day.

- The effect of rumour after a critical incident can be a very damaging phenomenon. The most appropriate way to deal with potential rumour is to communicate reliable information at regular intervals. Briefing staff, parents and students would be appropriate. Persistent rumour could provide fuel for potential defamation charges. Always bear in mind that such rumour would attract the attention of the media and form the basis of less than desirable coverage. Consequently, any strategy, which allays rumour, is a useful control device if used early.
- Reporters should be ushered firmly and courteously away from other areas of the School property and directed to the Head of School's Office. If possible, deflect Reporters away from students and other staff as they are being accompanied to the Head of School's Office. Do not be lured into commenting, however innocuous the questions seem, but indicate the Head of School will be in the best position to give factual information and to comment and is willing to speak to Reporters.
- Do not underestimate the media's speed of reaction, their interest, or their impact on the School's reputation. Reassure Reporters, as you direct them to the Head of School's Office, that:
 - The Head of School will speak with them and give briefings.
 - Statements will be issued.
 - The School respects their deadlines.
 - The School wishes to cooperate with them.
 - It is the responsibility of the School to organise parents to assist in emergency situations, as and when required.

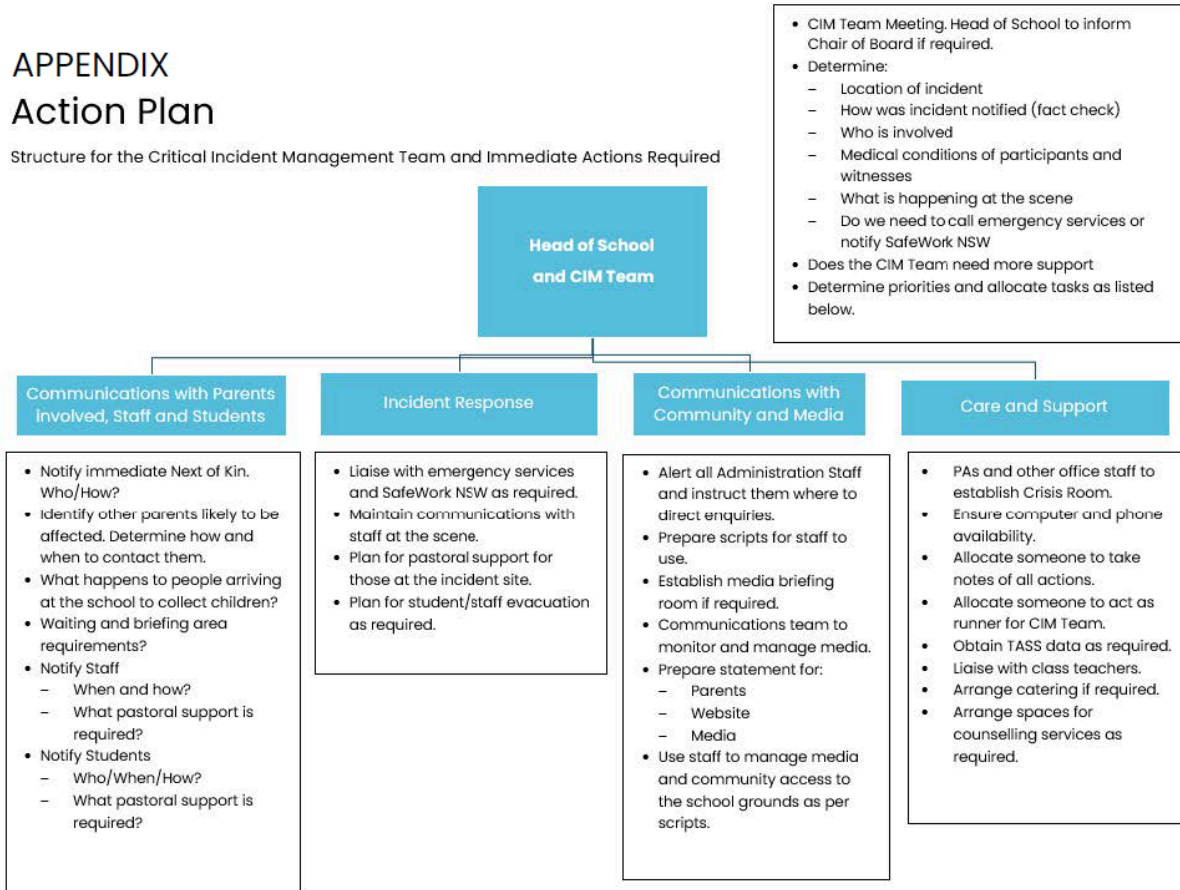
6. Implementation

This Policy is provided to new Staff, and to Volunteers and Contractors on commencement of their work at the School.

If you have any queries about this policy, you should contact the Head of School for advice.

APPENDIX Action Plan

Structure for the Critical Incident Management Team and Immediate Actions Required



Contact list to alert Critical Incident Management Team

POSITION	NAME	PHONE NO.
Head of School	Matt Macoustra	Via PA to HoS
PA to the Head of School	Kate Grogan	02 4908 4011
School Administration (Secondary)	Hill Campus	02 4929 5811
School Administration (Primary)	Park Campus	02 4925 2121