



SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 57 (PRINCE GEORGE)

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PUBLIC

CRITICAL EVENT RESPONSE HANDBOOK

PROTOCOL and PROCEDURES

This protocol is based on the training provided to SD 57 Critical Event Response Team by the University of Maryland Baltimore County Emergency Health Services, the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation and the Safer Schools Together Critical Incident Response and Management Training.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What is a Critical Event?	Pg. 4
Why have a District Wide Process?	Pg. 6
Critical Event Response Team	Pg. 7
Critical Event Response Process	Pg. 9

SECTION 1

UNDERSTAND

What is a Critical Event?

What Is a Critical Event?

Critical events are unexpected events that interrupt the normal flow of the school community. These events can trigger a range of emotional responses, from shock and disbelief to significant distress that impair an individual's ability to function effectively. While some people may exhibit immediate reactions, others may not experience or express the effects of a critical event until weeks or months later. Without appropriate support and intervention, the impact of a critical event can be long-lasting and detrimental to the mental health and well-being of students, staff, and the broader community.

A critical event is any event that would have a **significant impact on the mental wellness of students, and/or staff as well as community**. Critical events may include but are not limited to death by suicide or attempted suicide, sudden or traumatic death, homicide or violent incidents, fire or other significant property damage, serious illness/injury, natural disasters or environment emergencies, or motor vehicle accidents.

The scope and impact of a critical event will vary depending on the circumstances and the number of individuals affected. As a result, the response required may range from targeted support for a small group to a coordinated response involving the entire school community.

Planning is essential to minimizing the adverse effects of critical events. Clear protocols, defined roles and responsibilities, and established support networks enable schools to respond promptly and effectively when faced with a crisis.

Providing timely support to students, staff, and families following a critical event can help reduce the risk of prolonged distress and prevent the escalation of concerns. Attention should be given to individuals who may be especially vulnerable due to previous experiences, existing mental health concerns, personal circumstances, or their proximity to the event. Supportive interventions can help individuals process their reactions, strengthen coping skills, and build resilience for future challenges. Families may also require information and guidance to help them support their children and one another during difficult times.

Responses to critical events must be culturally responsive and sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of students, staff, and families. Grieving practices, expressions of emotion, and approaches to healing can vary significantly across cultures, faith traditions, and individual experiences.

Members of a CERT should understand trauma-informed practice, common stress reactions, grief and loss, and the ways in which developmental stages influence an individual's response to crisis. Support may include psychological first aid, debriefing opportunities, counselling services, and referrals to community resources. Appropriate and timely intervention can play a critical role in promoting recovery, strengthening resilience, and, in some cases, saving lives.

SECTION 2

PROCESS

District Wide

WHY HAVE A DISTRICT-WIDE PROCESS?

Schools may have to respond to critical events that are non-death or death related. Critical events can occur in the school, school community, or other locations.

A district-wide process ensures a means to respond in an effective and coordinated manner. Calm and accurate communication will be delivered to all those impacted by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the School Principal, District Personnel and District Critical Event Response Team (CERT)

A district-wide process provides guidelines to the School Principal and to the Critical Event Response Team to aid in assessing and responding to a critical event.

It is the responsibility of the Principal (or designate) to make the initial assessment of the critical event, this may be in consultation with the Director Inclusive Education and the CERT Lead. The Principal (or designate) informs the Director of Instruction, Inclusive Education and possibly meets the Critical Event Response Team.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The physical and emotional safety of everyone in School District No. 57 (Prince George) is of primary consideration.

It is based on the premise that we are living in a society where sudden or violent death is not uncommon either by accident or by suicide.

Everyone in School District No. 57 (Prince George) is entitled to protection from physical and/or emotional harm.

All correspondence and information are subject to the guidelines set forth in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA).

Collaboration among all concerned parties is the most effective way to prevent a critical event from developing further and causing emotional injury.

CRITICAL EVENT RESPONSE TEAM

MEMBERS and ROLES

The Critical Event Response Team (CERT) consists of individuals trained to help survivors with the grieving process. Crisis intervention targets the RESPONSE not the EVENT. The district can provide mental health clinicians and other trained personnel who are available to assist schools in the management of a critical event and the response to it.

WHO DECIDES?

In consultation with the Director of Inclusive Education and the CERT Lead, the Principal will determine which staff will be called upon to provide assistance.

CRITICAL EVENT TEAM MEMBERS

In any given situation assistance could be provided from the following:

- ☐ Critical Event Response Lead
- ☐ District Mental Health Clinicians
- ☐ District Youth Care Workers
- ☐ Indigenous Education Social Workers
- ☐ Indigenous Education Youth Care Workers
- ☐ Director of Inclusive Education
- ☐ Associate Superintendents
- ☐ Superintendent

This group may decide to add other school personnel and other school district personnel or community members.

TTOCs and Casual CUPE staff

During the period after the critical event, if possible, the TTOCs and Casual CUPE staff will be selected regarding their familiarity with the school in lieu of dispatch. Also, please inform TTOCs and Casual CUPE staff coming to the school of the situation prior to them accepting the position.

SECTION 3

CRITICAL EVENT RESPONSE Process

CRITICAL EVENT RESPONSE PROCESS

It is the responsibility of the School Principal (or designate) to make an initial assessment of the critical event and inform/consult with the Director of Inclusive Education and the CERT Lead (or designate).

It is as important for the Teacher in Charge (TIC) as it is for the Principal to be familiar with the guidelines and procedures.

PLANNING and PREVENTION

- ☐ Designate roles and responsibilities within the school i.e. fan out calls, help coordination of rooms.
- ☐ Determine school staff fan out process – includes teachers, office personnel, EA's, YCW's, IEW's, custodians.
- ☐ Gather history of school or school community critical events.
- ☐ Understand the possible trauma history, recent events or circumstances that put any staff member at increased risk of being negatively impacted by the event.
- ☐ Update staff fan out phone list and review the process with the whole staff and ensure emergency contact for all staff members are up to date – update regularly (includes staff members who are on leave).
- ☐ Review basic critical event response protocol with the whole staff
- ☐ Remind all staff that they must inform principal of any incidents that they are aware of that might affect the school community.
- ☐ Update student call/email lists and plan for incident if it occurs outside of school hours i.e. location of phone lists
- ☐ Designate Safe Room(s)/areas

CRITICAL EVENT RESPONSE

IMMEDIATE ACTION

Principal will gather and verify facts from the following individuals:

- ☐ **FAMILY (Parents/Guardians)**

Of the utmost importance is clarifying the situation with a view of what can be shared with staff and students

If necessary,

- ☐ RCMP
- ☐ Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD)
- ☐ School staff members
- ☐ Feeder School Principals
- ☐ Transportation - Bussing
- ☐ Other

ASSESSMENT of EVENT

In consultation with Director of Inclusive Education and CERT members, Principal will assess LEVEL of RESPONSE required for critical event

LEVEL ONE - Director of Inclusive Education and CERT Lead will:

- ☐ Confirm information of facts with the Principal
- ☐ Review CERT Process and provide CERT Handbook to all team members
- ☐ Consult, support and recommend actions/plans with the Principal
- ☐ Collaborate with Principal to prepare and provide written statements to go to staff,
- ☐ Communicate with students and parents
- ☐ Inform Associate Superintendents, District Mental Health Clinicians, PGTD/ACUPE personnel, and community agencies' if warranted.
- ☐ Deploy District Mental Health Clinicians to the school for additional support

Principal will:

- ☐ Organize time for CERT Staff Meeting and delegate, if warranted, duties to school staff

LEVEL TWO

Director of Inclusive Education and CERT Lead will activate LEVEL 2 response process:

In addition to Level 1 response as above:

- ☐ CERT members and Principal meet prior to the CERT Staff Meeting to plan the activities of the day
- ☐ Contact and deploy CERT team members as required
- ☐ Contact community agencies and private schools
- ☐ Create a CERT Staff Meeting agenda
- ☐ Confirm everyone has an updated staff phone/contact list
- ☐ Formulate letters for parents and additional information/resources for school website
- ☐ Coordinate CERT Team Debrief process during and after critical event

Prepare statements for:

- ☐ Office staff responding to parent phone calls
- ☐ Teachers to read to their students to inform of event and supports in place at the school

STUDENT SUPPORT RESPONSE

Depending on the nature and impact of the critical event on the school community, a range of student supports may be provided to ensure students feel safe, connected, and cared for during this difficult time. Supports may include:

- ☐ Designated safe spaces staffed by Mental Health Clinicians and District/School Youth Care Workers.
- ☐ Individual check-ins for students who may be struggling, provided by Mental Health Clinicians, Indigenous Education Social Workers, and School Counsellors.
- ☐ Grief processing and support groups facilitated by Community Counsellors or Mental Health Clinicians to help students understand and express their emotions.
- ☐ Ongoing support and monitoring of student well-being and emerging needs.

District student supports will remain in place for as long as students and the school community require assistance in responding to and recovering from the crisis.

RECRUITMENT

District Critical Event Team Lead will consult with Director of Inclusive Education about plans for additional support staff i.e. administrators, office staff, TTOC's, YCW's, EA's support, if warranted

- ☐ Determine, with the Principal, whether additional staff (PGDTA/CUPE) may be needed to release regular staff members or individuals on staff who may be profoundly impacted by the incident.
- ☐ Determine through consultation with Director of Inclusive Education suitable District Support Personnel and other supports that may be made available to help.

INFORMING STAFF

Principal and administration team:

- ☐ Inform the staff via a phone call fan-out process prior to their arrival at school; this may be followed up by an email.
- ☐ Notify all staff of a CERT Staff Meeting where they will be fully briefed.
- ☐ Be sure to inform office staff, EAs, YCWs, IEWs, custodians, itinerant staff, bus drivers, PGDTA/CUPE union Presidents and noon hour supervisors, staff on leave or holidays.
- ☐ Ensure that school staff and/or CERT members who are doing the phoning have a written statement to read. Remind them to stick to the verified facts.
- ☐ Prepare for CERT Staff Meeting

CERT STAFF MEETING

Principal or designate:

- ☐ Meet with all staff in a room that is as private as possible.
- ☐ Share the verified facts about the incident.
- ☐ Introduce the CERT members

Remind staff that it is important to have consistency in communications to students

- ☐ Ask staff to be alert regarding any students or staff members who seem to be having a difficult time dealing with the incident. Ask staff to put the concern in writing and to give it to the Principal.

COMMUNICATION with Parents of Students

Director of Inclusive Education and CERT Lead will prepare:

- ☐ A letter to go home with students informing parents of the critical event. This letter is also able to go on the school website and social media sites.
- ☐ A written statement to be read if families p h o n e the school for updates and information.
- ☐ Information for the school website and social media sites.
- ☐ CERT members and/or school staff who may carry out the role of phoning parents/families, if warranted

Principal will:

- ☐ Ensure the prepared letter is sent home with students and/or emails sent to families.
- ☐ Update school website and social media sites with prepared information.

ASSESS APPROPRIATENESS of School Activities

Due to triggering content related to the critical incident, Principal or to designate will:

- ☐ Cancel school-based activities, when appropriate
- ☐ Postpone or rearrange guest speakers
- ☐ Assess suitability of any messages on a school sign of upcoming holidays/events

Principals should contact the Office of the Secretary Treasurer for guidance regarding flag protocol and for approval of the half-masting of flags in situations affecting their individual schools or communities.

DEBRIEF and FOLLOW UP

CERT and appropriate staff will meet prior to the end of day one

- ☐ Debrief at the end of the day as a small team
- ☐ Plan for a staff debrief at the end of the day to provide updates, answer questions, receive feedback regarding response plan to date, make changes, and prepare for next day.
- ☐ Establish a plan for the following day.
- ☐ Review the list of vulnerable students and staff.
- ☐ Ensure appropriate supports are in place.
- ☐ Replenish supplies, as needed
- ☐ Evaluate need for District support personnel

COMMUNICATION with the Media

- ☐ Only to be done by the Superintendent of Schools

CERT during a school break

- ☐ Principal to inform and consult with Director of Inclusive Education and CERT Lead to determine and assess response level and process to be completed prior to staff and students return to school and for the first few days back in session.
- ☐ Director of Inclusive Education and CERT Lead may prepare and provide a written statement to be provided to ALL staff, parents and students, this may be in consultation with the school Principal.
- ☐ Principal, after consultation with Director of Inclusive Education and CERT Lead, initiates a phone call fan out to ALL staff members, as needed

DEBRIEF PROCESS

Organized and planned by Director of Inclusive Education and CERT Lead.

- ☐ School Staff CERT debriefing, if required, to be determined by the Director of Inclusive Education and CERT Team Lead in consultation with the Principal and staff, may be completed by a District Mental Health Clinician and or the school district EFAP provider.
- ☐ CERT team members debrief may be completed by the school district EFAP provider.

CONTACTING the FAMILY

Principal or designate will contact the family

- ☐ When contacting the family, express sympathy both personally and on behalf of the school.
- ☐ Let the family know the school's plan for helping students and staff, cope with the loss and clarify which facts can be made public.
- ☐ Ask the family how they feel about the student or staff contacting them for condolences
- ☐ Make note of who was spoken to, **and details of what was granted permission to do by the family spokesperson.**

PERSONAL BELONGINGS

Principal or CERT member will immediately:

- ☐ Move contents of student's locker, desk or cubby to a secure place until a family member or designate comes to the school. Remember to look for artwork on walls and any projects on display
NB: It may be best to replace the lock with a similar lock already in use on the locker.
- ☐ Rightfully, the deceased's belongings are the property of the family. Arrange a time for the family to come to the school outside of school hours i.e. after school
- ☐ The student's desk should remain in place for an appropriate length of time. Remove the desk at the soonest "natural" break i.e. weekend or holiday

HOME VISIT

Principal

- ☐ Visiting the home of the deceased's family is encouraged, and it is recommended that you take along a staff member (one who is known to the family and connected to the student).
- ☐ Ask about service arrangements and the family's wishes. When details are final, this information may be given to staff and students.
- ☐ Consult with the family regarding student involvement and attendance at the service.
- ☐ It is appropriate to bring cards of condolence if you feel the family is ready to receive them. Otherwise, pass these along to an extended family member or family friend/family member designate

AFTER the SERVICE

Principal and CERT members:

- ☐ Consider plans for when the students and/or staff members return to school
- ☐ Do you want to send out a closure statement to all students and staff?
- ☐ It is important for the school to maintain regular routines, those individuals most affected by the critical event will likely experience ongoing grief and some will require ongoing support

MEMORIAL INFORMATION

- ☐ To ensure the well-being of all students and staff and to maintain an environment focused on learning and support, schools **do not** establish permanent memorials on school grounds following the death of a student.

