

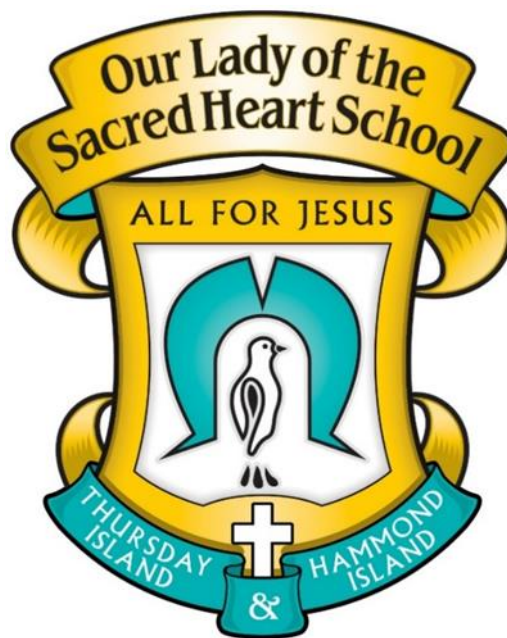


**Catholic  
Education**  
Diocese of Cairns

*Learning with Faith and Vision*

# Critical Incident Response Plan

2026



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## INTRODUCTION

While we take every appropriate precaution to ensure the safety of our staff and students, even the best-prepared school can suffer an emergency or critical incident. This plan has been developed to assist schools in managing post critical incident response, in line with core principles of effective incident management.

Some information used within this plan has been sourced from or informed by Brisbane Catholic Education and has been used with their kind permission. Resources from *Beyond Blue* have also been referred to and accessed regarding suicide.

## PURPOSE

This plan provides clarification and details for all aspects within the Critical Incident Response Procedures poster (below).

The purpose of this Critical Incident Response Plan document is to provide the school with a plan which can manage any emergency or critical incident and, if required, escalate the response in accordance with Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns (CEDC) guidelines. Some incidents can be managed at a local school level, while others will have such an impact that we will require the assistance of Catholic Education Services (CES) resources to manage the situation.

This plan is designed to:

1. Enable the school to respond quickly, act decisively and manage effectively in the event of an incident,
2. Reduce the impact of the incident on staff, students, and the broader school community,
3. Enable the school to effectively escalate the response in accordance with CEDC guidelines,
4. Ensure CEDC meets the high standards required to ensure the safety of our staff, students in addition to protecting the necessary resources.
5. Minimise disruption to work and/or the learning process, and

This plan applies to the management of our response to all critical incidents that impact the school and CEDC, and makes considerations for all employees, students, families, assets, facilities and the broader school community.

### 1.1 WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?

1. Determine who will sit on the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) and fill in their details [here](#).
2. If the school has allocated a room for support (counselling etc.), please nominate the room [here](#).
3. Ensure yourself and the CIRT have read through and are familiar with the contents of this plan.
4. Ensure copies of the Critical Incident Response Procedure poster are displayed in leadership areas and are immediately available for quick reference in the event of a critical incident.
5. Observe all other preparation tasks found in [Be Prepared](#).

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## CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PROCEDURES

**Be Prepared**

**Maintain and update Critical Incident Response Plan with clearly stated procedures for:**

- Leadership and coordination through Critical Incident Response Team
- Training, rehearsals and drills
- Monitor and review
- Communication and awareness of the procedures

**CONTACTS**

**Emergency Services**  
Ph: **000 or 112**  
Ph: 106 (text based service for hearing or speech impaired)

**State Emergency Services (SES)**  
Ph: 132 500

**DSP**  
Ph: .....

**Parish Priest**  
Ph: .....

**Work Health & Safety Manager**  
Ph: 0413 707 385

**Executive Manager Communications & Engagement**  
Ph: 0407 580 612

**Executive Leader Wellbeing & Learning**  
Ph: 0419 994 372

**Executive Manager Building & Planning**  
Ph: 0429 353 214

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**1 IMMEDIATELY**

1. Ensure the safety of all involved by following the school's Emergency Management Plan
2. Decide immediate response procedure – eg evacuate, lockdown
3. Account for everyone
4. Ensure continuing safety
5. Establish facts
6. Phone Emergency Services if required (see CONTACTS)
7. Contact DSP

**2 ONCE SAFETY ASSURED**

1. Complete the Immediate Response Checklist
2. Contact DSP to provide briefing and identify support required
3. Coordinate CIRT briefing session
4. Communicate with relatives in case of death or injury
5. Document facts
6. Inform all stakeholders
7. Inform all stakeholders in relation to death or injury

**3 WITHIN 24 HOURS**

1. Monitor and support student wellbeing
2. Monitor and support staff wellbeing
3. Plan normal routines
4. Facilitate a media conference

**4 BEYOND 24 HOURS**

1. Continue ongoing debriefing
2. Continue to monitor and support student and staff wellbeing
3. Prepare formal Critical Incident Report
4. Plan for return of injured staff/student/others
5. Plan for formal proceedings (inquests, court, funerals, liturgies)

## WHAT IS A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

A critical incident is defined as any unanticipated event or circumstance with the potential to cause considerable damage or loss to assets or resources, have serious deleterious effects on the broader organisation, cause serious illness or injury, or causes the majority of people to experience uncharacteristically strong emotional or psychological distress which has the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the time of the event or later.

Critical incidents that do not involve physical harm (real or potential), significant property damage (real or potential), or mass elicitation of strong emotional feelings will be managed via the school's Business Continuity Plan. This may include events such as loss of funding, or IT failures.

Critical incidents may include:

- Natural disasters (e.g. [cyclones](#), [fires](#)),
- Community based incidents (e.g. public transport tragedies),
- Industrial accidents (e.g. explosions, [chemical spills](#)),
- School related incidents (e.g. fire, laboratory accidents, bus crashes, [serious playground or sporting accidents](#), school camp accidents, international excursion issues or extreme physical violence, including student violence),
- Threats against a school, office, students or staff members (e.g. bomb threats),
- Serious criminal allegations against students or staff (e.g. sexual abuse),
- [Alleged criminal activity](#) (e.g. drugs, assaults), or
- Sudden death or [serious injury](#) of staff member or student or family member.

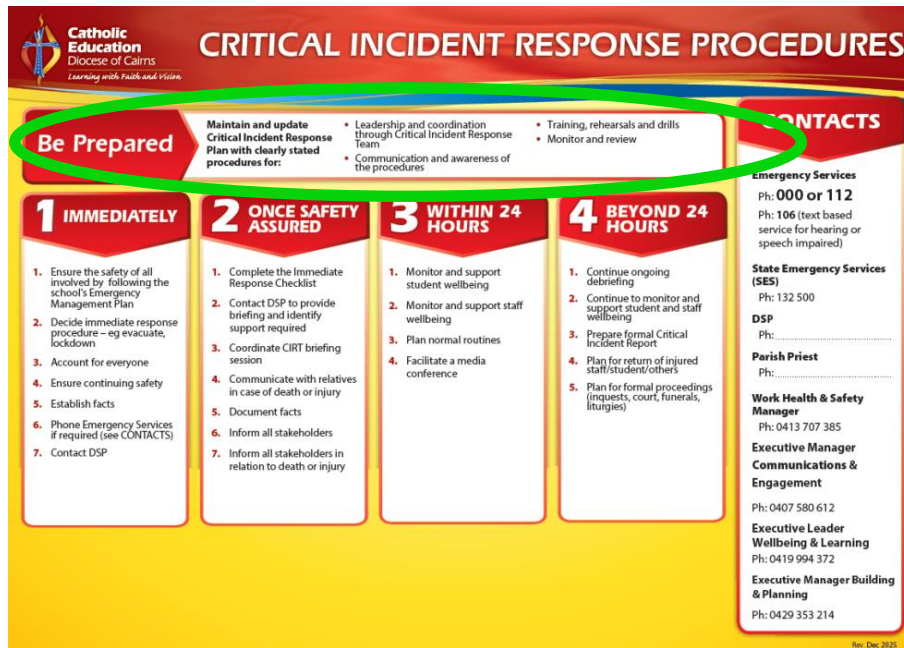
## OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this plan are to provide clearly defined:

- Documented instructions to support the response to a critical incident, and
- Critical incident management roles, accountability, responsibility and authority

This will provide clear demonstration to the school community that the school has an effective critical incident response plan.

**BE PREPARED**



Schools are required to update the following section and adhere to the following preparation tasks in this section.

**LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION THROUGH CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM (CIRT)**

The structure of the CIRT is designed to ensure that the required persons with the necessary delegation, knowledge and experience are utilised in the response to managing a critical incident. During a critical incident the principal, or their authorised delegate, will activate the CIRP, and provide ongoing strategic direction. The principal is required to:

- Oversee all formal notifications,
- Act as the spokesperson, and
- Manage interaction with higher level stakeholders

**Critical Incident Response Team members:**

NAME	ROLE
David Graham	Principal
Hannah Coburn	APRE
Peta Mawn	Leader of Diversity
Christine Benjamin	Indigenous Liason Officer
Michelle Comino	Teacher (Kirriri)

**Allocated support room for this school**

<b>Room/s</b>	<b>'Lighthouse Room' Student Support HUB &amp; Kirriri Teacher Preparation Area</b>
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## COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS OF THE PROCEDURES

It is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of their roles and responsibilities in regard to the Critical Incident Response Plan.

## TRAINING REHEARSALS AND DRILLS

Having an effective CIRP requires:

- a. Having personnel trained to fulfil their roles and responsibilities within the plan,
- b. Having the plan exercised to validate its content, and
- c. Having any systems that support the activation of the plan tested to ensure their operability in a functioning environment.

It is imperative employees with specific roles or responsibilities receive the necessary training. This should align to the training required by all staff on their relevant Lock-Down Procedures and Evacuation Procedures.

CIRT training should include scenario-based activities relevant to school operations and activities and consider the range of risks to which the school may be exposed. These scenarios should be extended to exercises that test the team in realistic situations that include interaction with a range of potential stakeholders.

The management, scheduling and reporting on the training and exercising of the CIRP is to be conducted annually.

## MONITOR AND REVIEW

Schools should regularly review this plan and associated emergency response plans. A review should also occur after a critical incident to determine the effectiveness of the plan and where improvements could be made. This information should be shared with CES and other schools as part of a shared commitment to improve this document and related school emergency management procedures.

## 2 IMMEDIATELY

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### CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PROCEDURES

**Be Prepared**

Maintain and update Critical Incident Response Plan with clearly stated procedures for:

- Leadership and coordination through Critical Incident Response Team
- Communication and awareness of the procedures
- Training, rehearsals and drills
- Monitor and review

**1 IMMEDIATELY**

1. Ensure the safety of all involved by following the school's Emergency Management Plan
2. Decide immediate response procedure – eg evacuate, lockdown
3. Account for everyone
4. Ensure continuing safety
5. Establish facts
6. Phone Emergency Services if required (see CONTACTS)
7. Contact DSP

**2 ONCE SAFETY ASSURED**

1. Complete the Immediate Response Checklist
2. Contact DSP to provide briefing and identify support required
3. Coordinate CIRT briefing session
4. Communicate with relatives in case of death or injury
5. Document facts
6. Inform all stakeholders
7. Inform all stakeholders in relation to death or injury

**3 WITHIN 24 HOURS**

1. Monitor and support student wellbeing
2. Monitor and support staff wellbeing
3. Plan normal routines
4. Facilitate a media conference

**4 BEYOND 24 HOURS**

1. Continue ongoing debriefing
2. Continue to monitor and support student and staff wellbeing
3. Prepare formal Critical Incident Report
4. Plan for return of injured staff/student/other
5. Plan for formal proceedings (inquests, court, funerals, litigates)

**CONTACTS**

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**DSP**  
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**Parish Priest**  
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**Work Health & Safety Manager**  
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The requirements in this section for ensuring safety have been numbered for referencing but may not necessarily happen sequentially. For example, if an emergency occurs and the school evacuates, staff may be tasked with calling 000 immediately, rather than after the evacuation has taken place.

### 2.1 ENSURE THE SAFETY OF ALL INVOLVED BY FOLLOWING THE SCHOOL'S EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

In the event of an emergency, the first consideration is the preservation of life. Schools should refer to their individual school [Fire Safety Management Plan](#), [Emergency Management Plan](#), or Lockdown procedures for guidance on ensuring safety. This may include staff and warden responsibilities, evacuation procedures and location of assembly areas. Procedures should reflect the need to rescue persons in danger without endangering the lives of others and limiting or containing the threat.

The [Veritas - WHS Critical Incidents and Emergency Planning page](#) has resources and templates that can be used to develop or review various emergency management plans. If the school needs specific advice on the development, implementation or operability of plans, please contact the [WHS Team](#).

To reduce or mitigate student behavioural risk, the Student Engagement Team provides Maybo training that includes the Maybo SAFER risk reduction response model. Please contact the [Student Engagement Manager](#) for this training.

### 2.2 DECIDE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE PROCEDURE E.G. EVACUATE, LOCKDOWN.

When deciding how to respond to an emergency, it is prudent to err on the side of caution and scale up initially until the situation is clarified. It is easier to scale down the response should the situation be less serious than first assessed.

When an emergency has been identified, schools should respond in accordance with their Lockdown, Fire Evacuation, or Emergency Management Plans.

### 2.3 ACCOUNT FOR EVERYONE

Lockdown, Fire Evacuation, or Emergency Management Plans should detail the school's procedure for ensuring that all persons are accounted for. This may be through several processes such as roll calls, buddy systems etc.

Whilst roll calls are important, during an evacuation the importance of a systematic and thorough evacuation should not be underestimated. This includes ensuring staff are assigned to check toilets, sheds and other often overlooked areas, having clearly defined "sweep" areas for wardens, and assigning sentries where required to prevent re-entry to affected areas.

## 2.4 ENSURE CONTINUING SAFETY

After the initial response has been completed, it is important to ensure the ongoing and continued safety of all persons. This is not just limited to physical safety.

Exposure to the death or injury of any person is a traumatic experience. Staff, students and parents immediately affected by the death or injury of person should not be left alone but should be comforted and supported by others until family members can take over that care. Safe and secure environments where this kind of crisis support can be provided to staff and students should be identified in the school's Critical Incident Response Plan (CIRP).

Take into consideration:

- Using screens, or blocking corridors, or using lock down procedures utilised if the site of the critical incident is to be isolated from student or unauthorised staff access,
- Do everything possible to protect others from viewing the site without disturbing the area that may need to be inspected by police/workplace health and safety, and
- Do not remove or disturb items from the site until the police / workplace health and safety have concluded their work and advised that the area is no longer a secured area.

### **A special note on suicide and non-suicidal self-injury.**

Any critical incident that results in the loss of life or injury to a student or staff member will result in a strong emotional reaction but the impact of suicide and/or non-suicidal self-injury on learning communities is particularly complex. This is related to the suddenness and shock experienced, perceptions of preventability and the difficulty in understanding why the person ended their life or deliberately injured themselves. Reactions can be complicated by guilt, anger, resentment blame or feelings of rejection. Importantly too is the risk of contagion, the process where one person's suicide or non-suicidal self-injury influences another person to engage in suicidal or non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour, and the need for a response to limit this.

Given this complexity and the risk of contagion, it is especially important that school leaders and CIRT members re-familiarise themselves with the information in these guidelines as soon as they are aware of onsite non-suicidal self-injury or any suicide or attempted suicide.

## 2.5 ESTABLISH FACTS

After the school has ensured the continued safety of all involved, it is important to establish the facts. This may be an ongoing process, but it is important to establish initial facts to determine post incident response. The [Incident Notification Checklist](#) will assist in the gathering of this information. Whilst it can be a difficult time for people who may have experienced trauma, it is important to obtain witness statements as early as possible.

If it is assessed that no immediate response is required by the CIRT, the situation is to be monitored and reassessed if it escalates. The principal may place members of the CIRT on standby.

If it is assessed that it is not a critical incident, but it has involved a serious work-related injury/illness, or a dangerous incident/near miss, then the Manager Work Health and Safety will be notified. If the incident relates to student behaviour, follow the [Student Behaviour Support Policy](#) and [Student Behaviour Support Procedure](#).

## 2.6 PHONE EMERGENCY SERVICES IF REQUIRED

In the event of an emergency, the school should seek emergency assistance by ringing 000. Mobile phone users may also use 112 or 106 for text-based service for hearing or speech impaired.

Emergency services will need to verify the nature and location of the emergency, so it is helpful to have this information ready.

Although listed as step 6, this may occur earlier in the school's incident response.

## 2.7 CONTACT DIRECTOR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE (DSP)

Once safety has been assured, the principal must contact the DSP and provide an overview of the incident and provide a brief verbal status report.

If an incident is assessed as requiring further support by CES, the Executive Director will organise this through the relevant CES delegate(s).

If the school is unable to contact their Director School Performance, they are to contact the Manager Work Health & Safety or the [Executive Manager Engagement & Wellbeing](#) (in cases of suicide or non-suicidal self-injury). Add link email

### 3 ONCE SAFETY IS ASSURED

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## CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PROCEDURES

**Be Prepared**

- Maintain and update Critical Incident Response Plan with clearly stated procedures
- Leadership and coordination through Critical Incident Response Team
- Communication and awareness of the procedures
- Training, rehearsals and drills
- Monitor and review

**1 IMMEDIATELY**

1. Ensure the safety of all involved by following the school's Emergency Management Plan
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7. Contact DSP

**2 ONCE SAFETY ASSURED**

1. Complete the Immediate Response Checklist
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7. Inform all stakeholders in relation to death or injury

**3 WITHIN 24 HOURS**

- Monitor and support student wellbeing
- Monitor and support staff wellbeing
- Plan normal routines
- Facilitate a media conference

**4 BEYOND 24 HOURS**

1. Continue ongoing debriefing
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**Executive Leader Wellbeing & Learning**  
Ph: 0419 994 372

**Executive Manager Building & Planning**  
Ph: 0429 353 214

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#### 3.1 COMPLETE THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE CHECKLIST

Complete Part 1 of the [Critical Incident Response Checklist](#)

#### 3.2 CONTACT DSP TO PROVIDE BRIEFING AND IDENTIFY SUPPORT REQUIRED

If not already done, the principal is to contact their Director School Performance who will notify the Executive Director. The [Incident Notification Checklist](#) may be useful in identifying what information to convey. Further information on the incident will be communicated to the DSP, including identifying what initial support the school may require.

If an incident is assessed as requiring further support by CES, the Executive Director will organise this through the relevant CES delegate(s).

If the school is unable to contact their Director School Performance, they are to contact the next available Director.

In the event of a suicide, serious injury or death in the school community the DSP will contact the Director Engagement - Wellbeing and Learning, who will take a leading hand in guiding the school through this process.

#### 3.3 COORDINATE CIRT BRIEFING SESSION

The first formal meeting of the team should be held as soon as possible after the CIRT has been mobilised. This is a key briefing and will set the initial focus of the CIRT. The primary outcomes of this briefing are that all key members of the team understand the situation, an initial plan is mapped out, and group tasks are allocated by the principal.

The [Incident Notification Checklist](#) should be used to guide the discussion and records actions.

While it is important that the activation of the CIRP requires the priority of effort to contain and control the situation, the continuity of normal day-to-day operations must be fully maintained where possible.

In the event that the school may need to be closed to ensure continued safety, this decision will be made in consultation with the relevant DSP and Executive Director.

### 3.4 COMMUNICATE WITH RELATIVES IN CASE OF DEATH OR INJURY

Contact with the family should be the responsibility of one staff member only, usually the principal or senior staff member. Contact with impacted families could be to advise of an injury and discuss appropriate communications with the wider school community. If the critical incident was not site based, or involved a serious injury or fatality, contact with the family should be made in consultation with police.

It is important to understand the family's wishes immediately about informing the school community of any critical incident that has resulted in the death or injury to a student or staff member. Families will often seek advice and guidance from school staff as to how to respond. If the incident relates to death by suicide and the family asks for advice about how the death should be referred to, it is appropriate to discuss:

- The damaging impact of misinformation,
- The advice by mental health professionals that death by suicide is best referred to as suicide,
- The importance of the school community being made aware of how best to minimise any suicide contagion,
- The importance of parents being made aware of how best to support their own children, and
- The option of only naming their child to their peer group and referring anonymously to their child with the rest of the school population.

The issue of whether or not a student or adult school community member is identified by name will vary depending on the wishes of the family and schools should be sensitive to any family requests regarding this. In the case of a student death, student grapevines will eventually name a student, but in recognition of family feelings it may be more appropriate initially to name the student only to staff, the students in the year level concerned or the class of a sibling.

Communication with families will be an ongoing process, and the school should remain in contact with the family during the response process.

### 3.5 DOCUMENT FACTS

The [Incident Notification Checklist](#) may be used to lay out the available information and assist in determining appropriate response and resources. This is not just vital for ensuring actions to be taken and task allocation, it will also greatly assist in identifying information to be conveyed to stakeholders.

It is important to note that gathering and updating of information is not a one-off step. Rather, updating and conveying of relevant information will be maintained as appropriate throughout the entire process.

### 3.6 INFORM ALL STAKEHOLDERS

In any critical incident, there is the potential for community members to experience heightened emotions and possible trauma. Providing the school community with clear and timely information following a critical incident is important to minimise misinformation and distress and provide a level of certainty around what will happen next. All communication to staff, students and the parent community should include:

- Confirmed facts regarding the critical incident,
- Proposed responses and actions, and
- Supports available, including resources about potential responses to traumatic events.

Critical incidents that result in the death or injury to a school community member require additional considerations, as detailed in the following section.

### 3.7 INFORM ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN RELATION TO DEATH OR INJURY

Family wishes regarding reference to the death or injury of a school community member will inform the nature of communication to all stakeholders. All communication must include information on support resources and possible reactions to traumatic events.

Awareness of cultural differences should be observed when communicating with the school and wider community.

#### 3.7.1 Staff [\(see example scripts in Appendix 4\)](#)

Staff (including absent & relief staff) should wherever possible always be advised prior to students and the community but after the CIRT have met to implement the CIRP. Where possible, the most-affected staff, or staff with a vulnerability, should be informed individually or in small groups by an appropriate staff member.

For larger schools with larger staff numbers, sector group (e.g. primary and secondary) briefings are preferred so that staff reactions are better able to be managed. This is particularly important when responding to the death of a staff member.

Staff should be informed of relevant information regarding the death or injury and those affected; giving enough detail to enable staff to contain rumours and support students. In the case of death by suicide, details regarding the method of suicide should be avoided.

All staff briefings in the first 24 hours period should be used to both convey and seek information. This contributes to a sense of collegiality and shared responsibility which helps protect the wellbeing of staff. Staff briefings should include:

- The facts of the situation, including the wishes of the family about what information they want shared or withheld,
- The members of the CIRT and their roles, particularly the staff member to whom people should convey any new or relevant information they receive,
- Any changes to responsibilities or routines,
- How phone enquiries should be managed,
- The principles of critical incident response management: to prevent further harm to others by identifying people at risk and linking them with appropriate support,
- Sources of support they can access for themselves at school and outside of school,
- An option to leave for the day rather than return to work. Ensure staff have appropriate supports if they choose to go home,
- A script if asked to inform students about the death/injury,
- Guidance for front office staff, as families may contact the school about the death/injury before receiving official communication from the school. Front office staff should be guided on how to respond to key questions and distress, and

- An option to opt out of tasks if they're feeling distressed and overwhelmed. Don't require staff to inform students of the death/injury if they don't feel able to do this. Staff who had relationship with the deceased or injured may not feel able to support students at this time, and alternative staff may need to undertake these responsibilities.

### 3.7.2 Students [\(see example script in Appendix 4\)](#)

The CIRT will need to assess whether all students should be informed, or whether it's more appropriate to limit the announcement to particular groups who are likely to have been exposed to or impacted by the death or injury (for example, students in the same year level of the deceased or injured).

Those students who the CIRT does identify as being appropriate to be informed should be informed as soon as possible. Whole school assemblies are not recommended because student reactions are more difficult to manage, and it is harder to support individuals. Home or pastoral groups or class groups are the preferred environments in which to inform students. This should be done by their usual teachers via a prepared script, assuming staff are comfortable to do so.

Providing staff with a script is an important way to support those staff for whom the task of informing students is stressful. It also ensures that accurate and consistent information is provided to students as a way of countering rumours and misinformation that inevitably arise in any crisis. The script should contain:

- Clear and accurate information,
- Acknowledgement that the situation will be distressing to family, friends and the school community,
- A statement that there's professional help available for mental health conditions and suicidal thoughts,
- Information about supports available within the school (for example, school wellbeing staff and the support room) and in the community (for example, additional CES school counsellors),
- A statement that young people should always tell a member of staff or another responsible adult if they have concerns about a peer,
- Information about normal grief reactions,
- A reminder about the importance of self-care, stress management strategies and supporting each other,
- A statement that rumours can be hurtful and unfair to the deceased, their family and their friends,
- Information about responsible use of social media,
- Instructions not to talk to the media and to refer any media enquiries to a nominated staff member, and
- A reminder about the process for leaving school grounds. Once you've informed students about the death or injury, give them time to process the information. Answer only basic questions and redirect more-complex questions to other staff members such as the wellbeing team.

### 3.7.3 Inform friends closest to the student

Ideally, these students will have been spoken to individually, or in small groups by a school counsellor or an appropriate staff member prior to other students being informed. Depending on their responses they should be offered the opportunity to use the support room or arrangements should be made for them to be collected by their parents.

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### 3.7.4 Inform students in the same year level ([see example script in Appendix 4](#))

Wherever possible, the homeroom or year level teachers (or equivalent) should inform young people in logical groups, such as homeroom or first period classes, using a script with the appropriate level of detail. This is done in recognition of their close association with the injured or deceased student, their anticipated desire for more information and their different needs for support.

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### 3.7.5 Inform students in the same class as a sibling

This group will need to be given additional assistance in understanding how to support their classmate once they return to school. It may be appropriate to have the school counsellor, or a mental health professional speak to this group as well as the class teacher. The issue of whether or not the student is identified by name will vary depending on the wishes of the parents, and schools should be sensitive to any parental requests regarding this.

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### 3.7.6 Parents and School Community ([see example letter in Appendix 4](#))

The CIRT should also consider contacting the parents of affected students to inform them of the death or injury and the possible impact it may have on their child. This should be done via a letter sent home via the usual communication processes, except for social media. Social media should not be used to communicate with the school community about the death or injury of a school community member. Giving parents immediate and accurate information about the school's response to the death or injury of a school community member is supportive of students and parents. It also protects the school in a number of ways:

- Limits misinformation and distress to the parent population,
- Reduces the number of enquiries,
- Encourages actions and attitudes that complement the school's CIRP,
- Helps parents to take supportive and protective action with their own children,
- Promotes communication with the school about wellbeing concerns, and
- Gives parents confidence in the school's capacity to return to a normal routine.

Parents may appreciate additional information and support; information on how to talk about grief/loss, suicide or traumatic events and answers to frequently asked questions and concerns.

## 4 WITHIN 24 HOURS

**Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns**  
Learning with Faith and Hope

### CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PROCEDURES

**Be Prepared**

Maintain and update Critical Incident Response Plan with clearly stated procedures for:

- Leadership and coordination through Critical Incident Response Team
- Communication and coordination of the procedure
- Training, rehearsals and drills
- Monitor and review

**1 IMMEDIATELY**

1. Ensure the safety of all involved by following the school's Emergency Management Plan
2. Decide immediate response procedure – eg evacuate, lockdown
3. Account for everyone
4. Ensure continuing safety
5. Establish facts
6. Phone Emergency Services if required (see CONTACTS)
7. Contact DSP

**2 ONCE SAFETY ASSURED**

1. Complete the Immediate Response Checklist
2. Contact DSP to provide briefing and identify support required
3. Coordinate CIRT briefing session
4. Communicate with relatives in case of death or injury
5. Document facts
6. Inform all stakeholders
7. Inform all stakeholders in relation to death or injury

**3 WITHIN 24 HOURS**

1. Monitor and support student wellbeing
2. Monitor and support staff wellbeing
3. Plan normal routines
4. Facilitate a media conference

**4 BEYOND 24 HOURS**

1. Continue ongoing debriefing
2. Continue to monitor and support student and staff wellbeing
3. Prepare formal Critical Incident Report
4. Plan for return of injured staff/student/other
5. Plan for formal proceedings (inquests, court, funerals, litigates)

**CONTACTS**

**Emergency Services**  
Ph: 000 or 112  
Ph: 106 (text based service for hearing or speech impaired)

**State Emergency Services (SES)**  
Ph: 132 500

**DSP**  
Ph: \_\_\_\_\_

**Parish Priest**  
Ph: \_\_\_\_\_

**Work Health & Safety Manager**  
Ph: 0413 707 385

**Executive Manager Communications & Engagement**  
Ph: 0407 580 612

**Executive Leader Wellbeing & Learning**  
Ph: 0419 994 372

**Executive Manager Building & Planning**  
Ph: 0420 353 214

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### 4.1 MONITOR AND SUPPORT STUDENT WELLBEING

#### 4.1.1 Contact Engagement – Wellbeing & Learning

If the School Counsellor is not already participating in the CIRT, then they should be engaged as early as possible to prepare for counselling for all affected students. Engagement - Wellbeing & Learning will be contacted to assist in organising appropriate counselling services.

It is understood that this can be a challenging and traumatic time for staff also. In these instances, it is important that staff should engage with Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services as soon as possible.

#### 4.1.2 Identify student groups most at risk

Take into consideration those students who are impacted or already considered at risk and continue to provide monitoring and support. This may include:

- Siblings of the deceased/injured,
- Young people who witnessed the death/injury,
- Young people with a history of a suicide attempt/s,
- Young people who are (or have been) accessing mental health services,
- Young people known to be struggling with grief or trauma related to other events (such as deaths, accidents, catastrophes, family breakdown or emotional, physical or sexual abuse),
- Young people in a severe state of distress,
- Close friends of the deceased, or
- The romantic partner of the deceased or persons with a romantic interest in the deceased

#### 4.1.3 Allocate support room for students

##### Allocated support room for this school

Room/s

'Lighthouse Room' Student Support HUB & Kirriri Teacher Preparation Area

The value of a support room is that it provides a safe and supervised location where students' grief and needs can be expressed, responded to and monitored. An appropriate staff member such as the school counsellor or another member of the support team who is assisting the counsellor must supervise the room at all times and following normal protective practices, the room's door should be left ajar rather than shut. The support room should be:

- Open during school hours only,
- Set up on the first day after the death or incident, if possible,
- A place for young people to go to receive support and have some quiet time to reflect,
- A safe, supervised located where student's grief and needs can be expressed, responded to and monitored, and
- Time limited – ensuring that the school community is prepared for the room's closure and that additional supports are put in place as required.

Where possible, a support room should:

- Be set up in a small to medium-sized room,
- Be private and easy to access,
- Provide protection from noise, bright light and high student traffic,
- Contain items such as water, tissues, cushions, bean bags, pens, paper, drawing materials, games and playing cards,
- Contain a sign-in sheet for students accessing the room, enabling the school to check against the attendance role and identify young people who may require additional support,
- Contain information about appropriate support services.

#### 4.1.4 Consider potential environmental impacts

The emptiness of a deceased student or staff member's chair or desk can be unsettling and evocative. After the funeral (or after a few days), seat allocations may be re-arranged to create a new environment. Teachers/CIRT members should explain in advance that the intention is to strike a balance between showing compassion and ensuring the classroom continues to be an effective learning environment.

## 4.2 MONITOR AND SUPPORT STAFF WELLBEING

Just as young people are offered counselling to help them manage grief, it's also important to consider the support needs of staff. It is important for nominated staff member/s to:

- Follow up with staff impacted or at risk to see if they additional support,
- Provide details of employee assistance programs (EAP) support options available to staff on and off site,
- Promote staff to seek appropriate support – this may be internal or external to the school and formal or informal,
- Be aware that staff may need time off to help them cope with emotional distress,
- Be aware that staff may need extra support to manage their job, and
- Ensure staff know they can request permission to be excused from performing certain tasks if they don't feel able to do so (for example, informing young people or staffing the student support room),

- Encourage staff to prioritise their own wellbeing and to ask for respite, support or a change in role or responsibilities if required.
- Arrange for several substitute teachers to be on hand to provide rotating support in case teachers need to take time out of their classrooms or wish to attend the funeral. Assign a member of the ERT as responsible for monitoring all staff wellbeing, absences and support needs.
- Front office and administration staff are likely to receive phone or online questions from distressed families. Providing them with a script to respond to these questions is advised to prevent staff uncertainty and worry about responding appropriately. [See example script in Appendix 4.](#)

#### 4.3 PLAN NORMAL ROUTINES

Research informs us that returning to normal routines can assist greatly in coping with critical incidents. The continuity of normal day-to-day operations is to be maintained as fully as possible.

As far as possible and appropriate, school timetables and routines should return to normal as soon as possible following a significant critical incident. The return to regular routines and activities is important to the recovery of all affected members in the school community.

Returning to normal routines does not mean that vigilance and awareness of student and staff wellbeing is lessened. This may continue for several months and longer for particular individuals. Returning a school to its regular routine may mean the school leadership needs to remind staff and students of its expectations of both groups.

Any decision to close the school in response to a critical incident should involve consultation with CES and the authorisation of the Executive Director, except in extraordinary circumstances where this consultation is not possible. Procedure link: [Closing and re-opening schools \(critical incidents\)](#)

#### 4.4 FACILITATE A MEDIA CONFERENCE

To ensure uniform communication channels, the principal has responsibility for communication with the media and other external stakeholders. Key messages and responses will be prepared in consultation with CES including the DSP and Manager of Communication & Engagement. Procedure link: [Media Management \(including Critical Incidents, Media Enquiries, Social Media\)](#)

## 5 BEYOND 24 HOURS

**Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns**  
Learning with Faith and Vision

### CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PROCEDURES

**Be Prepared**

**Maintain and update Critical Incident Response Plan with clearly stated procedures for:**

- Leadership and coordination through Critical Incident Response Team
- Communication and awareness of the procedures
- Training, rehearsals and drills
- Monitor and review

**1 IMMEDIATELY**

- Ensure the safety of all involved by following the school's Emergency Management Plan
- Decide immediate response procedure – eg evacuate, lockdown
- Account for everyone
- Ensure continuing safety
- Establish facts
- Phone Emergency Services if required (see CONTACTS)
- Contact DSP

**2 ONCE SAFETY ASSURED**

- Complete the Immediate Response Checklist
- Contact DSP to provide briefing and identify support required
- Coordinate CIRT briefing session
- Communicate with relatives in case of death or injury
- Document facts
- Inform all stakeholders
- Inform all stakeholders in relation to death or injury

**3 WITHIN 24 HOURS**

- Monitor and support student wellbeing
- Monitor and support staff wellbeing
- Plan normal routines
- Facilitate a media conference

**4 BEYOND 24 HOURS**

- Continue ongoing debriefing
- Continue to monitor and support student and staff wellbeing
- Prepare formal Critical Incident Report
- Plan for return of injured staff/student/others
- Plan for formal proceedings (inquests, court, funerals, liturgies)

**CONTACTS**

**Emergency Services**  
Ph: 000 or 112  
Ph: 106 (text based service for hearing or speech impaired)

**State Emergency Services (SES)**  
Ph: 132 500

**Police**  
Ph: 131 150

**Parish Priest**  
Ph: 0413 707 385

**Work Health & Safety Manager**  
Ph: 0413 707 385

**Executive Manager Communications & Engagement**  
Ph: 0407 580 612

**Executive Leader Wellbeing & Learning**  
Ph: 0419 994 372

**Executive Manager Building & Planning**  
Ph: 0429 353 214

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As up to date information emerges the CIRT may decide on what and how to communicate to the community.

### 5.1 CONTINUE ONGOING DEBRIEFING

- CIRT ensures that individuals are given the opportunity to debrief,
- CIRT debriefs as a team,
- CIRT sets a date for the formal debrief with appropriate CES staff, and
- CIRT ensures that continued information is shared with the parent community.

### 5.2 CONTINUE TO MONITOR AND SUPPORT STUDENT AND STAFF WELLBEING

This conscious and deliberate process should continue to be a focus for the CIRT. The impact of a critical incident may continue for as long as there are students and staff in the school who were present at the time of the incident. In the first month, the CIRT should be looking for obvious signs of staff or student distress and responding to them in the ways outlined previously and in partnership with the school counsellor, Engagement - Learning & Wellbeing staff and other mental health professionals.

The school should be aware that any other crises in the school community are likely to be felt more profoundly by those who have been affected by the critical incident. If further incidents occur, particularly those that result in the death or injury of a school community member, it should be anticipated that many staff and students will return to their earlier levels of grief. They will therefore require their earlier levels of support and monitoring.

### 5.3 PREPARE FORMAL CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORT

The [Incident Notification Checklist](#) may be used to inform the report.

## 5.4 PLAN FOR RETURN OF INJURED STAFF/ STUDENTS/ OTHERS

The return of injured staff will still be managed through normal established return to work procedures. This will include liaising with the Injury and Illness Officer, and the development of Suitable Duties Plans. These Suitable Duties Plans will be able to capture the current working environment and accordingly determine how best to integrate the worker back into the workplace. If the staff member was injured due to the critical incident, then additional support may be required for a successful return to full working duties.

Returning staff members will also need to be considered for counselling if this has not already been undertaken.

The return of injured students will be a collaborative initiative with input from all stakeholders including, the student, their parents/caregivers, relevant medical professionals (including mental health providers) and the school counsellor. In the case of a student returning following a suicide attempt, a clear safety plan should be established and shared with relevant staff.

## 5.5 PLAN FOR FORMAL PROCEEDINGS – INQUESTS, COURT, FUNERAL, LITURGIES

### 5.5.1 Funerals

It is important to remember to keep the regular school routine intact as much as possible. This benefits the whole school, including those who may not have known the deceased.

Schools may appear to provide an obvious setting for a funeral or memorial service because of their connection to the community and their ability to accommodate a large crowd. However, it is advised that such services not be held on school grounds. This enables the school to focus instead on maintaining its regular schedule, structure and routine. Additionally, using a room in the school for a funeral service can inextricably connect that space to the death, making it difficult for students or staff to return there for regular classes or activities.

In situations where school personnel are able to collaborate with the family regarding the funeral or memorial service arrangements, it is also strongly advised that the service be held outside of school hours. If the family does hold the service during school hours, it is recommended that the school remain open.

Students should be permitted to leave school to attend the service only with appropriate parental permission and supervision. In the case of the death of a student, the school principal and other senior school staff should attend the funeral. It should be made clear to the student and staff body that there is no expectation on them to attend. It should also be considered if having additional counsellors attend the funeral would be beneficial.

### 5.5.2 Memorials

School communities often wish to have a memorial for a student or staff member who has died. Being compassionate while maintaining the school's primary focus of education can be a tricky balancing act. In the case of suicide, schools must consider how to appropriately memorialise the student or staff member without increasing the risk of suicide contagion.

It is very important that schools try to treat all deaths in the same way. Having one approach for memorialising a student or staff member who died of cancer or in a car accident and a different approach for a student or staff member who died by suicide reinforces stigma and may affect the deceased's family and friends. It is important to memorialise the student or staff member in a way that

does not inadvertently glamorise or romanticise either the student/ staff member or the death. Schools can do this by emphasising the connection between suicide and underlying mental health issues. These issues can cause difficulties, though they may not be apparent to others.

### 5.5.3 Subpoenas, inquests court orders and other legal documentation

In the event of a death or a serious injury, there is a chance that there may be some form of legal inquiry. If the school receives any request to provide information, they are to refer to and be guided by the [Responding to Subpoenas and other Legal Documentation](#) procedure. In the event of a student death by suicide, schools should seek guidance from the police prior to the return of any student belongings to the family e.g. locker contents.

## 6 ENQUIRIES









[Manager Work Health and Safety](mailto:dkemp1@cns.catholic.edu.au) (dkemp1@cns.catholic.edu.au)

[Director Engagement Wellbeing & Learning](mailto:bdaniels@cns.catholic.edu.au) (bdaniels@cns.catholic.edu.au)

[Executive Manager – Engagement & Wellbeing](mailto:hchapman1@cns.catholic.edu.au) (hchapman1@cns.catholic.edu.au)

[Assistant Executive Director](mailto:aobrien5@cns.catholic.edu.au) (aobrien5@cns.catholic.edu.au)

## 7 RELATED DOCUMENTATION

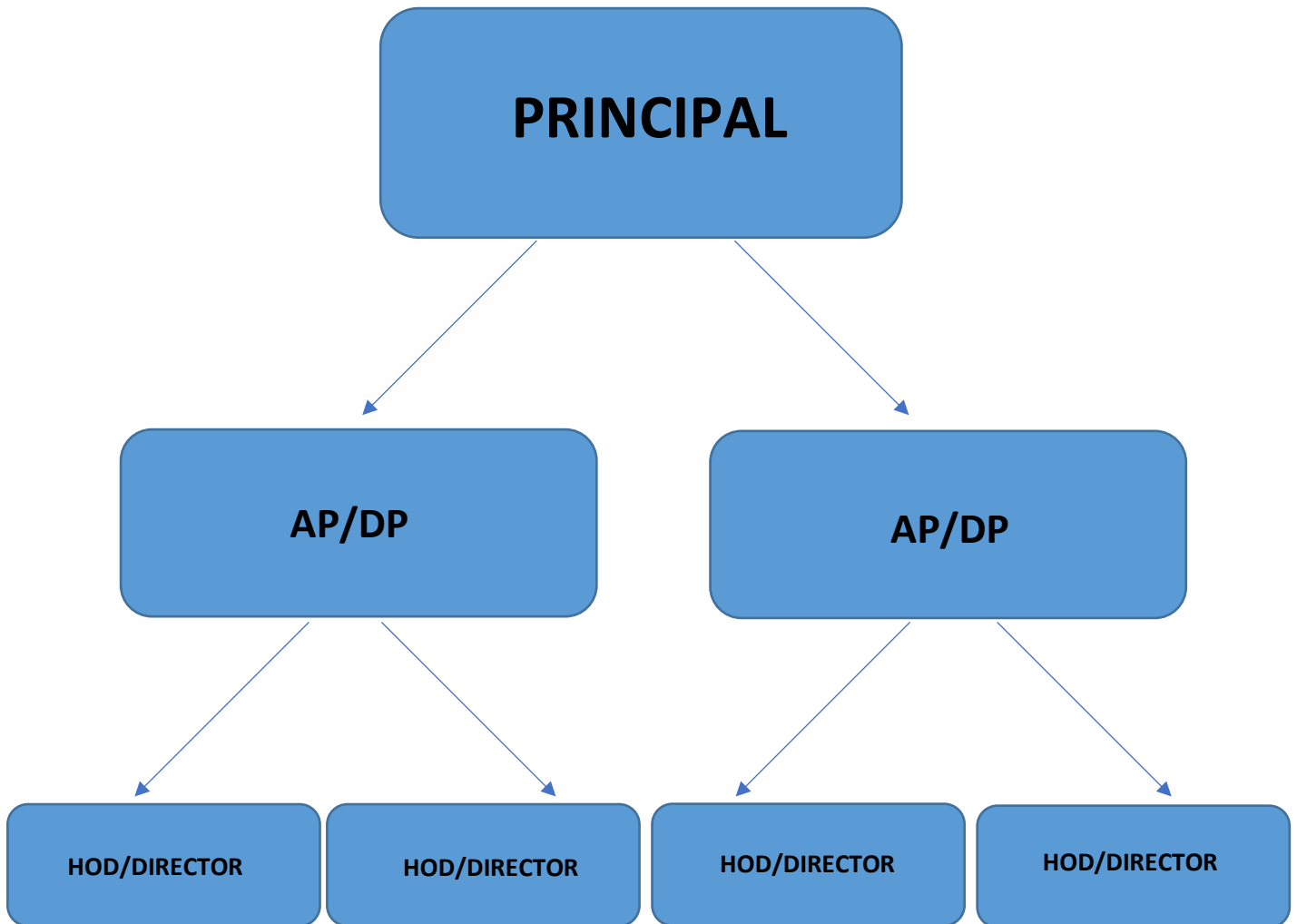
-  [Critical Incidents Poster](#)
-  [Closing and re-opening schools \(critical incidents\)](#)
-  [Managing cyclonic events](#)
-  [Media Management \(including Critical Incidents, Media Enquiries, Social Media\)](#)
-  [Fire Safety Management Plan template](#)
-  [Emergency Management Plan template](#)
-  [Responding to Subpoenas and other Legal Documentation](#)
-  [SMS Critical Incident templates](#)

## APPENDICES

### 8.1 APPENDIX 1- INCIDENT NOTIFICATION CHECKLIST

School name:	Date:
Notification taken by:	Time:
Notification provided by:	Time:
<b>Incident / Issue Description</b>	<b>Details</b>
What has happened?	
Where has it happened?	
When did it happen?	
What is at risk?	
Is everybody accounted for? Where are staff and students located? Are there casualties? Is the area secured from unauthorised access?	
<b>Incident / Issue Status</b>	<b>Details</b>
Is the situation contained or escalating? Is there potential to escalate?	
What are your objectives? What are you trying to make happen / prevent from happening?	
What actions have been taken? Who is taking these actions? What actions are planned next?	
Who is responding? What resources are being used?	
Do you have any advice on what the root cause of this incident/issue is?	
<b>Additional Support</b>	<b>Details</b>
Personnel	
Resources	
Specialist equipment	

## 8.2 APPENDIX 2 – SAMPLE COMMUNICATION TREE



## 8.3 APPENDIX 3 – CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE CHECKLIST

1. Immediate response	RESPONSIBILITY
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure the safety of all involved	
<input type="checkbox"/> Decide immediate response procedure	
<input type="checkbox"/> Account for everyone	
<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure continuing safety	
<input type="checkbox"/> Establish facts	
<input type="checkbox"/> Phone emergency services if required	
<input type="checkbox"/> Contact DSP	
<b>2. Once safety is assured</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Complete Part 1 of this checklist	
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide briefing to DSP	
<input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate CIRT briefing session	
<input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with relatives	
<input type="checkbox"/> Document facts	
<input type="checkbox"/> Inform all stakeholders	
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff	
<input type="checkbox"/> Students	
<input type="checkbox"/> Friends closest to student	
<input type="checkbox"/> Students of the same year level	
<input type="checkbox"/> Students in the same class	
<input type="checkbox"/> Parents and school community	
<b>3. Within 24 hours</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for counselling	
<input type="checkbox"/> Plan normal routines	
<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitate a media conference	
<b>4. Beyond 24 hours</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Continue ongoing briefing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Encourage all stakeholders to access support	
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for post-traumatic stress	
<input type="checkbox"/> Prepare formal Critical Incident Report	
<input type="checkbox"/> Plan for return of injured staff/ students/ others. Consider any support plans.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Plan for formal proceedings – inquests, court, funeral, liturgies	
<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct post incident review with CIRT e.g. what was effective? any opportunities for improvement/change/prevention? any feedback to CES?	

## 8.4 DRAFT SMS – CRITICAL INCIDENT (LIVE) – 160 CHARACTER LIMIT

SMSs have a character limit of 160 – some sample SMSs (and their character count) for a variety of situations are provided below. Schools may amend these to suit their circumstances.

The suggested approach to content contains four steps:

1. What we have done. Lead with the response rather than the event/incident. This helps provide reassurance the incident is under control e.g. ‘School safely evacuated...’
2. The incident – a bomb threat, fire, intruder etc
3. Reassurance - e.g. ‘All safe and well’ or ‘All OK’
4. Next step e.g. ‘Next SMS @noon’

As parents may have children at multiple schools it is important to name your school (abbreviation ok) in the SMS (unless the school’s name appears in the subject line of the SMS).

Also remember that in some critical incidents the school will be under the control of police and/or emergency services. It will be necessary to check all messages with them before being transmitted.

### During

Emergency	SMS message	Count
<b>Bomb threat</b>	SSCC safely evacuated following bomb threat at 11am. Police on site. Waiting for all clear. Further update within hour & by email.	130
<b>Fire</b>	St Michael’s safely evacuated following fire at 11am. Fire brigade on site. Waiting for all clear. Further update within hour & by email.	137
<b>Suspicious person</b>	SM College in lockdown & following procedures - suspicious intruder on site. Do not approach school- Police in control. Update within hour & by email.	149
<b>Cyclone/flooding</b>	Parents please collect children asap if safe to do so due to extreme weather. Contact GCPS for alternate arrangements if unable. Safety is highest priority.	157
<b>Other useful lines</b>	School is not cancelled.	24
	Police advise parents may not enter school grounds.	51
	All students & staff safe & accounted for.	42

### All clear

<b>Bomb threat</b>	SSCC given all clear. Police say call was hoax. Normal school resuming now. Students responded very well. Will debrief in class. Further info by email.	151
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<b>Fire</b>	St Michael's given all clear. Normal school resuming now in unaffected areas. Students responded well, will debrief in class. Email to follow re tomorrow's classes.	158
<b>Suspicious person</b>	Offender in custody. All safe and well. School resuming, students responded well, will be debriefed in class. Parents welcome to attend debrief. Check email.	157
<b>Cyclone/flooding</b>	Worst has passed, school damage being assessed. GCPS closed, will advise reopening date. Please contact school if assistance is required. Further info by email.	160
<b>Other useful lines</b>	School has returned to normal.	30
	No need for parents to collect children till end of school day.	63

### Final message

<b>Bomb threat</b>	Thanks for your support. School pick-up and buses today as usual. Helpful to talk over at home tonight. Please advise if your child needs extra care tomorrow.	158
<b>Fire</b>	Thanks for your support. School pick-up and buses today as usual. Helpful to talk over at home tonight. Please advise if your child needs extra care tomorrow.	158
<b>Suspicious person</b>	Thanks for support. Normal school pick-up, buses. Helpful to talk over at home tonight. Please advise if child needs extra care tomorrow, counsellors on hand.	158
<b>Cyclone/flooding</b>	School reopens Wednesday. Please advise if your child is unable to attend or needs extra care when back at school. Counsellors will be on hand.	143
<b>Other useful lines</b>	Well done to students & staff for their response.	49
	Thanks to police/firies/emergency services for assistance.	31/22/44
	Well done to staff for well managed critical incident response.	63

## 8.5 APPENDIX 4 – SAMPLE DOCUMENTS AND ADVICE FOR STAFF

These scripts will help you to prepare wording suitable for communicating with your school community following the death of a school community member. These scripts must be checked for suitability and modified depending on the circumstances and level of consent you have to share information.

- 📄 [Sample prayer script](#)
- 📄 [Sample script for notifying staff of the death of a student or staff member \(not by suicide\)](#)
- 📄 [Sample script for notifying staff of suicide of a student or staff member](#)
- 📄 [Sample script for notifying general student population of the death of a student or staff member](#)
- 📄 [Sample script for notifying students in the same year level of the death of a student](#)
- 📄 [Sample parent/caregiver letter following death of student or staff member \(not by suicide\)](#)
- 📄 [Sample parent/caregiver letter following suicide of student or staff member](#)
- 📄 [Sample office/administration staff script for responding to parent/community queries following the death of a school community member](#)

### 8.5.1 Sample prayer scripts

Help us, our God of love, to believe that there is no pain you cannot heal, no tragedy that is too big to overcome. Be with us in our sadness at the death of [deceased name]. May his/her family and friends know and be comforted by your loving presence. Give to us all the strength of faith and hope to believe that [deceased name] has now returned to you, the source of our joy, our peace and our life. We make this prayer in the name of the one who came to tell us the good news of your love, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Loving God, in times of sorrow and loss, you are with us. May your love surround the [family of the deceased name] family, bringing comfort and strength. Help us to trust in your mercy and to carry [deceased name] memory with love and grace. Be near to all who are grieving and grant us your peace. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

### 8.5.2 Sample script for notifying staff of the death of a student or staff member (not by suicide)

Today/yesterday the school was given the very sad news that [name and year level of student, staff member name] has died.

Their family have shared with us that [name of deceased] died by [insert brief confirmed facts of death]. This understandably will be a very difficult time for [name of deceased's] close family, friends and teachers, and for all of us who knew them. I have spoken with [name of the deceased's] family and offered the heartfelt sympathy of our whole-school community as well as any support we are able to give.

It's likely to take us some time to process this information and [name of deceased] death will affect us all in different ways. For this reason, if you can't be in the classroom, please let [name of nominated staff member] know and alternative arrangements will be made.

Prioritising your own mental health and wellbeing during this time is paramount. In addition to enacting your own personal support network, the following are important support options for you to use if needed [list the available support options for staff].

In supporting our school community, we will be following our critical incident response principles, which recommend identifying people at risk, ensuring staff and students are supported and consulting with experts in the mental health field. Our Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) is made up of [name the members].

The following are our plans for today [list any addition personnel at the school, support options available for students, any other relevant changes or requests, any changes to curriculum and how unexplained absences will be immediately followed up].

Our priority now is to inform students of the death by [insert process of informing students decided by CIRT] and we will be asking [name of staff or groups of staff] to assist us by informing students via a script we will provide. We will forward you via email a number of information sheets providing information about death, grief and loss which you may find useful in being able to support students. If you are concerned about any student or colleague, please let [name of nominated person] know so they can be supported. A notice will also go home to families about the death, so they can work with the school to support their child.

If you are approached by anyone from outside of the school to comment on the death, please refer them to [name of nominated staff member] and refrain from sharing information regarding the student or the incident.

We'll keep you informed as much as possible over the next week, though please as the CIRT any questions and share any information you may have with us. At this stage, we don't have any information about the funeral arrangements for [insert name of student/staff member]. Depending on the wishes of the family, we may provide more information about this when we can.

As this will be a challenging time for our school community, it's important that we look after ourselves and each other. Once again, I encourage you to prioritise you own mental health and wellbeing considering this sad news, and to use the support options available [relist the staff support options here].

### 8.5.3 Sample script for notifying staff of suicide of a student or staff member

Today/yesterday the school was given the very sad news that [name and year level of student, staff member name] has died. Their family have shared with us that [name of deceased] died by suicide. This happened away from school.

I have spoken with [name of the deceased's] family and offered the heartfelt sympathy of our whole-school community as well as any support we are able to give. [Share any wishes of the bereaved family]

This understandably will be a very difficult time for [name of deceased's] close family, friends and teachers, and for all of us who knew them. It's likely to take us some time to process this information and [name of deceased] death will affect us all in different ways. For this reason, if you can't be in the classroom, please let [name of nominated staff member] know and alternate arrangements will be made.

Prioritising your own mental health and wellbeing during this time is paramount. In addition to enacting your own personal support network, the following are important support options for you to use if needed [list the available support options for staff].

In supporting our school community, we will be following our critical incident response principles, which recommend identifying people at risk, ensuring staff and students are supported and consulting with experts in the mental health field. Our Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) is made up of [name the members].

Our priority now is to inform students by [process of informing students decided by CIRT], and we will be asking [name of staff or groups of staff] to assist us by informing students via a script we will provide. When talking about suicide, thoughtful and accurate communication is important. Here are some key messages that the school would like for you to use:

- Don't glamourize suicide, inadvertently endorse or stigmatise suicide
- Don't talk about the method of the suicide
- Talk about multiple factors causing suicide, not one factor
- Don't ask young people directly about what they know
- Remind students that rumours are not helpful and try to contain or dispel them
- Promote help-seeking
- Answer basic questions and redirect more complex questions to an individual conversation space of the school wellbeing team

We will also forward you via email several information sheets providing information about suicide, death, grief and loss which you may find useful in being able to support students. This will include a few common questions and answers about suicide that you might find useful when supporting students.

The following are our plans for today [list any addition personnel at the school, support options available for students, any other relevant changes or requests, any changes to curriculum and how unexplained absences will be immediately followed up].

If you are concerned about any student or colleague, please let [name of nominated person] know so they can be supported. A notice will also go home to families about the death, so they can work with the school to support their child.

At this stage, we don't have any information about the funeral arrangements for [insert name of student/staff member]. Depending on the wishes of the family, we may provide more information about this when we can.

If you are approached by anyone from outside of the school to comment on the death, please refer them to [name of nominated staff member].

We'll keep you informed as much as possible of the next week, though please ask the CIRT any questions and share any information you may have with us. As this will be a challenging time for our school community, it's important that we look after ourselves and each other, and use the support options available [restate the staff support options here].

### **Helpful links for school staff**

[Understanding suicide - information for the community](#)

[Staff grief after a suicide](#)

[Supporting young people after a suicide](#)

### **HOW TO TALK TO STUDENTS FOLLOWING A SUICIDE: COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

Suicide is a difficult topic for most people to talk about. This guide suggests ways to talk about key issues that may come up when someone dies by suicide.

#### **What do I say if students ask me why the student/staff member died?**

It is common to try to answer the question "why?" after a suicide death. Suicide is a complicated behaviour. It is not caused by a single event. We can communicate this by saying:

*"We are never going to know the answer to that question because suicide is complex. What we do know is that suicide is not caused by a single event. In many cases, the person has a mental health disorder and then other life issues occur at the same time leading to overwhelming mental and/or physical pain, distress, and hopelessness. There are effective treatments to help people with mental health problems or who are having suicidal thoughts {list support options at school and other known support options e.g. Lifeline, Kidshelpline}."*

#### **What do I say if students blame themselves or others for the death?**

It is not uncommon in times of grief for individuals to blame themselves or others in some way/s. When the death is by suicide, this blame can be even more pronounced. Reiterating that suicide is complicated and not caused by a single event is important. We can also say:

*"Blaming others or the person who died does not consider the fact that the person was experiencing a lot of distress and pain. Blaming is not helpful and can hurt another person deeply."*

*"This death is not your fault. We cannot always see the signs because a suicidal person may hide them. We cannot always predict someone else's behaviour."*

### **What do I say if students ask me how the student/staff member suicided?**

Talking in detail about the method can create images that are upsetting and can increase the risk of imitative behaviour by vulnerable individuals. For this reason, the focus should not be on how someone killed themselves but rather on how to cope with feelings of sadness, loss, anger, etc. You can do this by saying:

*"I don't know the details as to how they died, other than that it was by suicide. I do know that hearing of the death of a young person by suicide can impact us all in different ways. Let's talk about how this death has affected you and ways you can handle it."*

If students continue to ask about the method, it is important to alert them to how upsetting this talk could be for others or yourself. You can do this by saying:

*"I can see that you are very curious about the details of this death. I don't know the exact details. I do know that for some people, hearing or talking about the details of the death can be upsetting for them. Let's be mindful of those people who might be upset by this and stop talking about the details now."*

### **What do I say if students are angry with the deceased?**

Accept expressions of anger at the deceased and explain that these feelings are normal. You can communicate this by saying:

*"It is okay to feel angry. These feelings are normal, and it doesn't mean that you didn't care about {deceased name}. You can be angry at someone's behaviour and still care deeply about that person."*

### **What do I say to students if I am worried about them or their friends?**

Encourage students to seek help from a trusted adult if they or a friend are feeling depressed. You can do this by saying:

*"Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness."*

*"We are always here to help you through any problem, no matter what. Who are the people you would go to if you or a friend were feeling worried or depressed or had thoughts of suicide?"*

*"If you are concerned about yourself or a friend, talk with a trusted adult."*

#### 8.5.4 Script for general student population of the death of a student or staff member

Today/yesterday the school was given the very sad news that on [*day*] one of our Year [*x*] students / [*staff member name*] died. All of us are thinking of his/her family and friends. Some students in our school, particularly his/her friends in Year [*x*] / those taught by [*staff member name*] will find this news very difficult to understand and accept. Other students—not just close friends / students of Teacher [*x*—are also likely to be upset perhaps because it reminds them of another sad event in their own life. Because of this, a support room has been set up in [*location*] for any students to go to if they feel they can't be in the classroom over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times. If you wish to use the support room, you need to get your teacher to [*insert usual procedure for student leaving class*].

Guidance counsellors and wellbeing staff will be available in the normal way to see students and we may have some extra counsellors in the school for a while. A notice is going home today to inform your parents about the death so they will understand if you want to talk with them today or sometime in the future. Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds, and if you are approached by anyone asking for information about this death, please tell them they should speak with [*nominated staff member*].

Be sensitive to people's feelings about this death, look out for each other and let a teacher or your parents know if you are worried about anything or anyone.

### 8.5.5 Script for notifying students in the same year level of the death of a student

Today/yesterday the school was given the very sad news that on *[day]* *[name of student]* died by *[insert cause of death as confirmed by the family]*. This happened away from school/at his/her home. This will be a very difficult time for *[name of student's]* family and close friends and for all of us who knew him/her and for a while it will be difficult for some students to think about anything else. For this reason, a support room has been set up in *[location]* for any students to go to if they feel they can't be in the classroom over the next few days. Someone will be available in the room at all times for you to talk with if you want to. Otherwise, it is a quiet place for you to retreat to if you need to. You need to get your teacher to *[insert usual procedure for student leaving class]*.

Guidance counsellors will be available in the normal way to see students and we may have some extra counsellors in the school for a while. A notice is going home today to inform your parents about the death so they will understand if you want to talk with them today or sometime in the future. Remember to use the normal signing out processes if you need to leave the school grounds. If you are approached by anyone from outside the school asking for information about this death, please tell them they should speak with *[nominated staff member]*.

We will keep you informed as much as possible over the next week. This is a time to be especially sensitive to each other's feelings and to look out for each other. Let a teacher or your parents know if you or your friends are worried about anything or anyone.

### 8.5.6 Sample Parent/Caregiver Letter Following Death of Student or Staff Member (not by suicide)

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

I am writing to you with some very sad news about a member of our school community. One of our Year [X students/ staff member name and position] died yesterday/today/over the weekend/during the holidays. *[Insert brief facts family have confirmed can be shared about the circumstances of death]*.

Our thoughts and prayers are with [name of deceased] family and friends. We have been in contact with his/her/their family and offered them the heartfelt sympathy of our whole school community and offered to provide any support we can.

Today and over the coming weeks, your child may be affected by this news in many ways. Every child will react in different ways and with different intensities. Some may cry and want to talk about the death, others will not want to speak about it. Some may find it hard to concentrate and complete their schoolwork, others may show very few reactions at all, especially if they did not know him/her. Their reaction may also change over time. This is all a normal part of grieving.

Many students will wish to talk with their family, so I've included some general information below which may assist you in these conversations. Your child may also prefer to talk about this situation with friends, which is normal and more likely to occur with young people. I encourage you to let your child know that you're aware of this incident and that you'll listen to their concerns at any time they wish to share them. I also encourage you to try to listen and to positively support them, even though this may be uncomfortable for you. Staying connected and engaged with your child is one of the best ways to support them.

Our school will be concentrating on supporting student and staff wellbeing over the coming months. This means that our school counsellors will be available to support students as per usual processes and that additional professional counselling will be available at [school name], through the Engagement - Learning & Wellbeing staff from Catholic Education Services Cairns. This also means that we will be returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible whilst recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come.

If you have any concerns about your child, please contact their class teacher or year co-ordinator in the first instance, so that we can arrange appropriate support.

At this stage, we don't have any information about the funeral arrangements for [insert name of student/staff member]. Depending on the wishes of the family, we may provide more information about this when we can.

In dealing with death, we need to remember the value of life. Please pray for [name of deceased] who is now at peace with God. I also ask you to remember the family of [deceased name], that they will be comforted and strengthened by the love of God and the whole school/parish community during this time of sorrow.

Yours sincerely

Principal

## Helpful links

[headspace](#) or [ehespace](#) – professional online and phone mental health support services to young people aged 12–25 years old. For information about grief, see: [Dealing With Grief And Loss & The Effects on Mental Health](#)

[ReachOut](#) – an online mental health organisation for young people and parents/carers. For information about grief, see: [Grief and Loss](#)

[Kids Helpline](#) – a free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.

[Lifeline](#) – 24-hour crisis support.

[Parentline](#) – an anonymous and confidential phone service for parents and carers of children from birth to 18 years old.

[Be You](#) – the national mental health in education initiative delivered by Beyond Blue, in collaboration with Early Childhood Australia and headspace. For information about grief, see: [Grief – Be You](#).

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### 8.5.7 Sample Parent/Caregiver Letter Following Suicide of Student or Staff Member

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

I am writing to you with some very sad news about a member of our school community. One of our Year [x] students [*insert deceased name*] / staff members [*insert deceased name and role*] died by suicide yesterday/today/over the weekend/during the holidays.

Our thoughts and prayers are with [name of deceased] family and friends. We have been in contact with his/her/their family and offered them the heartfelt sympathy of our whole school community and offered to provide any support we can.

Today and over the coming weeks, your child may be affected by this news in many ways. Every child will react in different ways and with different intensities. Some may cry and want to talk about the death, others will not want to speak about it. Some may find it hard to concentrate and complete their schoolwork, others may show very few reactions at all, especially if they did not know him/her. Their reaction may also change over time. This is all a normal part of grieving.

Many students will wish to talk with their family and so, I've included some information below that may be helpful to you in discussing suicide with your child. When talking about the issue of suicide try to include discussion about positive ways of managing problems. Two important messages to promote are:

- All of us should seek help from others when we feel down or vulnerable, and
- Young people should tell a trusted adult if they are worried about a friend or themselves

If your child shares their emotions and feelings with you, try to listen and to positively support them, even though this may be uncomfortable for you. I encourage you to speak with your child about responding to this news with compassion and the thoughtful use of social media. I also encourage you to let your child know that you're aware of the incident and that you'll listen to their concerns at any time they wish to share them. Staying connected and engaged with your child is one of the best ways to support them.

Our school will be concentrating on supporting student and staff wellbeing over the coming months. This means that our school counsellors will be available to support students as per usual processes and that additional professional counselling will be available at [school name], through the Engagement - Learning & Wellbeing staff from Catholic Education Services Cairns. This also means that we will be returning the school to normal routines as soon as possible whilst recognising that students can be affected by this event for many months to come.

At this stage, we don't have any information about the funeral arrangements for [insert name of student/staff member]. Depending on the wishes of the family, we may provide more information about this when we can.

If you have any concerns about your child, please contact child's year coordinator, school counsellor or myself so that we can arrange appropriate support [insert contact details]. Contacting these nominated staff members is an important way to ensure you receive consistent and accurate information and for us to be aware of all family concerns.

In dealing with death, we need to remember the value of life. Please pray for [deceased name] who is now at peace with God. I also ask you to remember the family of [deceased name], that they will be comforted and strengthened by the love of God and the whole school/parish community.

Yours sincerely,

Principal

## Helpful links

[headspace](#) or [eheadspace](#) – professional online and phone mental health support services to young people aged 12–25 years old. For information about grief, see: [Dealing With Grief And Loss & The Effects on Mental Health](#)

[ReachOut](#) – an online mental health organisation for young people and parents/carers. For information about grief, see: [Grief and Loss](#)

[Kids Helpline](#) – a free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25. For information grief and suicide, see:

[Kids Helpline: When someone dies by suicide](#)

[Kids Helpline - supporting a child through grief and loss](#)

[Lifeline](#) – 24-hour crisis support.

[Parentline](#) – an anonymous and confidential phone service for parents and carers of children from birth to 18 years old.

[Be You](#) – the national mental health in education initiative delivered by Beyond Blue, in collaboration with Early Childhood Australia and headspace. For information about grief and suicide, see:

[Understanding grief](#)

[Suicide - Information for Families](#)

[Supporting young people after a suicide](#)

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### 8.5.8 Sample Office/Administration Staff Script for Responding to Parent/Community queries

#### **OFFICE OR ADMINISTRATION STAFF SCRIPT FOR RESPONDING TO PHONE/ONLINE ENQUIRIES FOLLOWING A DEATH/SUICIDE**

##### **Script to use if the Principal is still confirming details:**

I can confirm that the school has received sad news. At this point in time, we do not have a lot of information. Once we receive any relevant details that should be shared then the principal will pass on this information as appropriate. Out of respect for the family of the deceased, confidentiality and the limits of my role, I am unable to comment any further.

I can appreciate that anything that you may have heard could be very upsetting for you and your children. Kids Helpline, headspace and Beyond Blue have many useful resources to support families and communities in times of grief. Kids Helpline can be phoned on 1800 55 1800.

##### **Script to use when death has been confirmed (not by suicide or when consent has not been given to name death as a suicide):**

I can confirm that the school has received some sad news that there has been a death of a [\[student/teacher/parent \(only if the CIRT team has determined sharing this death is appropriate\)\]](#) from our school. Our school principal is in the process of sharing information by [\[email/letter\]](#) OR Our school principal communicated with all staff and families with the information known to the school via

[email/letter] on [insert date]. Our of respect for the family of the deceased, confidentiality, and the limits of my role, I am unable to comment any further.

I can appreciate that this news may be very upsetting for you and your children. Kids Helpline, headspace and Beyond Blue have many useful resources to support families and communities in times of grief. Kids Helpline can be phoned on 1800 55 180

**Script to use when death has been confirmed and consent to name as suicide:**

I can confirm that the school has received some sad news that there has been a suicide of a [student/teacher/parent (only if the CIRT team has determined sharing this death is appropriate)] from our school. Our school principal is in the process of sharing information by [email/letter] OR Our school principal communicated with all staff and families with the information known to the school via [email/letter] on [insert date]. Our of respect for the family of the deceased, confidentiality, and the limits of my role, I am unable to comment any further.

I can appreciate that this news may be very upsetting for you and your children. Kids Helpline, headspace and Beyond Blue have many useful resources to support families and communities in times of grief. Kids Helpline can be phoned on 1800 55 1800.

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#### 8.5.9 Sample Parent/Caregiver Letter Following Student Behaviour Incident

**AUDIENCE: just the class that the situation occurred - not the cohort.**

**GOAL: to communicate with families, but not to escalate the situation, ensure families feel confident with the supports in place, student in question has their privacy and dignity maintained.**

Dear Parents,

I am writing to let you know that today, the students in your child's class [xxx], were moved from the regular classroom to the [xxx] during the morning session to ensure the safety of everyone. This was in response to a classroom disruption, whereby a student required support to self-regulate. The students later returned to their classroom to resume their regular learning. The Leadership Team, spoke with the whole class, to best support the students' understanding of the situation and actions taken. Should your child express concern about this situation, or if you have any questions, please feel welcome to contact [xxx] to discuss further.

## 8.6 APPENDIX 5 – KEY CONTACTS

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**Emergency Services** 000 or  
112 (mobiles only where no signal)

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**Director School Performance** or Work Health & Safety Manager or  
another Executive Leader if not available  
(see mobiles below)

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**Parish Priest**

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**Work Health & Safety Manager**  
Mob: 0413 707 385

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**Executive Leader Wellbeing and Learning**  
Mob: 0419 994 372  
Ph: 07 4050 9722

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**Executive Manager Building & Planning**  
Mob: 0429 353 214

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**Executive Manager Communications and Engagement**  
Mob: 0407 580 612

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## CES LEADERSHIP

NAME	TITLE	MOBILE
Diarmuid O’Riordan	Executive Director	0423 856 266
Wayne Wood	Deputy Executive Director	0427 400 990
Bradley Currie	Executive Leader People & Culture	0417 102 762
Brooke Daniels	Executive Leader Wellbeing & Learning	0419 994 372
Rachel McLean	Executive Leader Identity & Outreach	0421 547 521
Melissa Turner (acting)	Director School Performance Secondary	0457 206 915
Melissa Turner	Director School Performance Special Assistance / Boarding / P-12	0457 206 915
Bronwyn Buckley	Director School Performance Primary	0412 648 856
Yvette McGowen	Director School Performance Primary	0421 649 716
Hannah Chapman	Executive Manager Engagement & Wellbeing	0412 230 077
John Phelan	Executive Manager Communications & Engagement	0407 580 612
David Kemp	Manager Work Health & Safety	0413 707 385
Paul McArthur	Chief Financial & Operating Officer	0447 509 717