



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga



Responding to Traumatic Incidents

*Checklist for Early Childhood Education
Services and Schools*

WHO CAN HELP?

In the event of a traumatic incident call:

0800 TI TEAM (0800 84 8326)

Or speak to your local Ministry of Education, Special Education traumatic incident coordinator or district manager.



WHAT'S THE CHECKLIST FOR?

The eight-step checklist will help you to respond to a traumatic incident or emergency. In the event of an incident follow the steps to manage the situation. Not all situations will follow the checklist in order. Use as appropriate.

WHAT IS A TRAUMATIC INCIDENT?

Traumatic incidents in New Zealand early childhood education (ECE) services and schools are broadly defined as events that:

- cause sudden and/or significant disruption to the effective operation of an ECE service, school and/or community
- have the potential to affect a large number of children, young people and/or staff
- create significant dangers or risks to the physical and emotional well-being of children, young people and/or people in the community
- attract media attention or a public profile to an ECE service or school.

Traumatic incidents don't always occur on site or during the hours of operation. They can occur during a field trip or sporting event. Examples include sudden death, serious injury, illness, violence, abuse and suicide. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, fires, flooding or volcanic eruptions are other examples.

WHY IS PLANNING IMPORTANT?

Evidence clearly shows that planning for a traumatic incident before it happens reduces the negative impact. All ECE services and schools need a plan and procedures to respond effectively to a traumatic incident. Typically, these plans are called Traumatic Incident Response Plans (or TIRPs). Ensure your plan can be used in a range of scenarios and incorporates a team approach.

1

Immediate Actions/Gather the Facts/ Assemble the Team:

- Listen to what has happened.
- Record the caller's name, phone numbers and names of others involved.
- Verify the facts of the event and record any actions taken.
- Check that the appropriate emergency services have been contacted.
- Check all students and staff are accounted for.
- Inform the caller of next steps and any actions you will take.
- Give the caller your name and phone number in case they need to call back.
- Decide on the need to establish your traumatic incident team to coordinate support.
- Inform the management committee, board of trustees and/or the Ministry of Education traumatic incident team.
- Set a meeting time and place to assemble.
- Inform any other ECE services/schools that may be affected.
- Establish a communication line with emergency services.
- Locate the master key, school floor plan, student lists and contacts, as relevant.
- Determine what, if any, information can be released to students or the community in consultation with emergency services and family.

2

Immediate Actions for the Traumatic Incident Response Team:

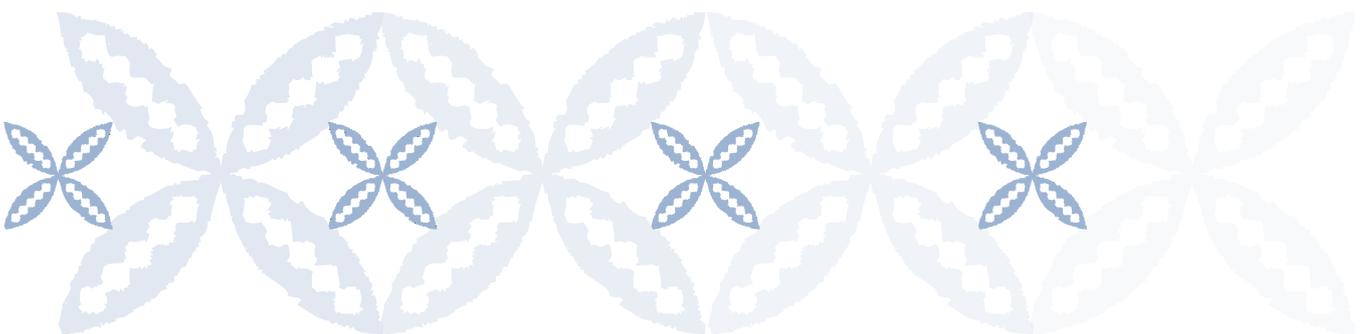
- Convene an on-site traumatic incident team meeting.
- Share facts and assess the impact of the crisis (When did the event occur? Where did the event occur? How did it happen? Are members of the traumatic incident response team involved?).
- Assign traumatic incident response team roles.
- Determine how many children, young people and staff are likely to be affected and any potential responses.
- Determine if the ECE service/school can remain open, eg, Are there enough staff? Is the school a crime scene?
- Decide if additional relief staff are needed.
- Decide if additional support services are needed.
- Assign phones for media, public, information and outside calls.
- Clear access to driveways for emergency response vehicle access.
- Liaise with transport operators (use passenger lists, route descriptions).
- Identify and prepare support rooms for children and young people who can't be supported in classrooms.
- Identify a possible media room and times, prepare media statement.
- Identify parent access sites or rooms.
- Set up a central information board to keep staff informed.
- Put relevant information on the central information board, ie, information about phones, student support rooms, media times and places, parent access etc.

3 Inform and Support Your Community:

- Determine how and when to release information to staff, eg, during a staff meeting.
- Determine how and when to notify all staff about the staff meeting time and remind staff of the traumatic incident response team role, ie, to help the ECE service/school resume functioning.
- Decide how and when information can be released, ie, in class groups (smaller), among staff.
- Develop sign in and out procedures for staff and visitors.
- Write statements for teachers to read to students.
- Determine communication and liaison with families and whānau.
- Write statements for the wider community.

4 Respond to Injured People:

- Establish communication and liaison links with medical staff.
- Ensure immediate medical intervention in life threatening situations.
- Ensure patients are prioritised for treatment in line with the severity of their medical condition.
- Keep accurate records of injured staff and students, doctors and hospitals involved.
- Communicate medical conditions and notify next of kin, release information in consultation with the traumatic incident response team and police.
- Consult and inform staff of the status and situation.
- Minimise student exposure to the injury scene.
- Manage parent arrivals and student release through agreed systems.
- Physically clean the site (in culturally appropriate ways).



5 Prepare for the Media:

- Designate a media spokesperson and confirm that no one else talks.
- Ensure sufficient staff and phones are available to handle incoming media and public calls.
- Log all calls, where possible.
- Transfer calls to appropriate team members and staff, ie, the identified media spokesperson.
- Brief all administration staff and teachers on all aspects of information flow.
- Develop a media response in liaison with management/the board (consider confidentiality, family and whānau wishes, cultural appropriateness, information available to be released and check with police and emergency services).
- Determine how and what information can be released to the community (eg, using recorded phone messages and staff statements).
- Maintain a media contact list.
- Control times and places of media arrival and remind media of the effect of media coverage on children and young people – especially if an incident involves suicide.
- Locate the mobile communication kit and check contents.
- Draft letters to be sent home to parents and caregivers, include facts, summaries, information about likely reactions and support networks.

6 Respond to the Media:

- Tell reporters you will call them back, then take the time to prepare your single over-riding communications objective (eg, the one thing you want your audience to remember).
- Ask the reporter for their name, organisation, contact details, general nature of their inquiry and who else they have spoken to.
- Talk only about your area of knowledge and expertise.
- Distinguish fact from opinion.
- Answer the questions firmly and directly.
- Keep to the issue and use key messages.
- Use plain language and avoid slang, jargon or waffle.
- Don't make personal comments.
- Don't criticise other people or organisations.
- Don't speculate.
- Don't say, 'no comment', instead, if you don't know the answer, say so. Nothing is 'off the record'.
- Don't look at or into the camera, instead talk to the interviewer, focusing at head level.

7

Support Affected Staff, Students, Parents and the Community:

- Prepare written material for the ECE service/school community to support their understanding of the event and communication with children and young people.
- Have teachers share prepared factual material with children and young people.
- Allow students to express thoughts and feelings regarding an incident.
- Clarify misinformation.
- Encourage teachers to normalise students' feelings and provide factual answers to questions.
- Encourage helping relationships, characterised by empathy, warmth and genuineness in the classroom.
- Take care not to lecture and to allow periods of silence for students.
- Avoid clichés such as 'be strong' and 'you are doing so well', they can reinforce a student's sense of aloneness.
- Be aware of cultural differences that exist in expressions of grief.
- Maintain confidentiality, where appropriate.
- Visit selected classrooms to provide opportunities for discussion and support.
- Identify high-risk children and young people and monitor classroom and school attendance closely.
- Monitor staff attendance closely.
- Support referrals for immediate outside support where needed.
- Provide contact numbers for parents to ring after hours.
- Document actions taken.
- Consider setting up an open forum for people to express concerns about the well-being of children and young people.
- Provide teachers, families/whānau and the community with information on supporting children and young people and where and how to seek additional support.



8

Evaluate Your Plan, Procedures and Practice:

- Meet to evaluate your plan, procedures and practice within two to three weeks of a traumatic incident.
- Look at ways to improve the plan and procedures, eg, by upskilling staff.
- Identify and follow up outstanding tasks and identify and address any concerns.
- Identify any ongoing support needs of staff and students.
- Discuss writing letters of appreciation (for people who helped) and/or any remembrance activities.





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