

## 2.1 CRISIS

**Approved by:** Board of Trustees  
**Contact:** Deputy Principals  
**Group:** Leadership Team

**Date effective:** Mar 2015  
**Review date:** Mar 2019  
**Reviewed by:** Leadership Team

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### Policy Statement

The Crisis Policy will ensure that the best possible assistance, support and counselling is delivered to all those who require it, and will ensure that normal routines of the school will continue in event of a crisis.

### Policy Rationale

When schools and their communities are affected in ways which interfere with their normal routines it is important that the school administrators and other key people are adequately prepared to deal with such incidents. While this Crisis Policy has been written with a particular focus on "death", eg suicide, motor vehicle accident etc, the guidelines can also be used in any major crisis situation within the school.

### Responsibility for implementation

1. **Leadership Team** Headmaster, Deputy Headmaster & Deputy Principals
  - To determine the Category of the Crisis and the Level of Response
  
2. **Crisis Team** Headmaster  
Deputy Headmaster and Deputy Principals as appropriate  
Guidance Counsellor BOT Rep, Boarding staff, Other support personnel as appropriate
  - To manage, co-ordinate, communicate and delegate tasks to initiate the Crisis Action Plan
  - Ensure Minutes are taken and distributed
  
3. **Administration Team** Deputy Headmaster  
Deputy Principals
  - To continue the normal routines of the school during the crisis period

### PROCEDURE TO INITIATE THE PLAN

1. Information about the Crisis - Headmaster
2. Headmaster consults Leadership Team
3. Headmaster communicates Category of Crisis & Level of Response to all staff if appropriate
4. Crisis Team & Administration Team mobilised (Category 3 or higher)
5. Crisis Team (including Administration Team leader) meet.
6. Action Plan Implemented

## ACTION PLAN

### Immediate

1. School staff and students actually involved in the incident and during the period directly after its occurrence to be given immediate counselling support.
2. Determination and communication of Crisis category & Level of Response.

Crisis category 1 & 2	Management team only
Crisis category 3 or higher (Defined in App. 2)	Crisis Team & Admin Team

### Procedures to be considered

- Role and level of involvement of school resources
- Allocation of tasks to each team member
- Plan communication to teaching office and support staff, students, (how and when) other schools attended by siblings and parents.
  - Use an established “phone tree” to inform all staff.
  - Provide facts of the incident
  - Outline the proposed school management plan (plan staff meeting, student assemblies, etc)
  - Construct a letter to parents. The letter has five functions. It tells parents:
    1. The facts
    2. What the school has done
    3. The school’s plans
    4. How the children may react
    5. How to get help
- Call on school support group/personnel plus other key persons if necessary
- Identify students/families most affected for immediate counselling.
- Set up the **Crisis Centre** – the library – space, privacy, phone, tea/coffee facilities etc – plus organise personnel.
- To appoint a media liaison person, consider a draft general statement and establish clear guidelines for liaison with the media.

Consideration also needs to be given to –

- Media access onto school property to staff and students.
- Clear factual information and judicious comments given only after next-of-kin informed.
- Avoiding speculative comments and if possible, emotional reactions.
- The likelihood of future enquiries (school, police, coroner)
- Protecting students from unwarranted interviews by the media.
- Monitoring rumour
- Involving guidance and counselling specialist in making media comment on the nature, scope and arrangements for support made available to students, teachers and parents.
- Thoroughly briefing the office staff.
- Planning a **home visit** to express condolences (2-3 team members), offer support and set up further communications.
- In the case of student suicide ensuring that the groups of students who are grieving remain on campus where they can be carefully monitored. See attached Suicide Appendix.

## DAY 1 AND 2

1. **Crisis Team and Admin Team leader**, meet early morning:
  - To identify and address physical, organisational and emotional unmet needs
  - To restore the school to regular routines
  - To plan the order of the day
  - To establish strategies for students/staff who require continuing support
  - To continue the Crisis Centre facilities and support provisions.
  - To plan further communication to parents if necessary.
2. **Staff Briefing**
  - Inform and update staff so they can update students. A written statement should be prepared for teachers to read to classes in cases of suicide.
  - Prepare staff to talk with the students – discussion of the event, how much should be said to students, signs to watch for and what to do for the distressed students.
  - Time must be given for the teaching staff to express their feelings and to gain a sense of support from each other.
  - Identify and counsel (individually) best friends of those involved, immediately. Also identify other suicidal students who may have their own problems and issues highlighted by the events.
  - Answer queries
  - Encourage teachers to allow students (especially those more directly involved) opportunities to talk about the incident and about their reactions.
  - Provide guidelines for identifying those who may be at risk (note: grievors who may not have been associated with the victim/victims).
  - Ascertain the scope, level and need for more intensive work with form class if required.
  - Provide advice on how to manage student reactions
  - Staff advised to offer support to students, encouraging them to see a counsellor at the Crisis Centre.
3. Home visit(s) by team members to determine the kind and level continuing of school support, funeral arrangements, memorial service etc
4. Update media as necessary.

## DAY 3

1. **Crisis Team and Admin Team leader** meet early morning:
  - To plan actions to address unmet needs
  - To plan the day
  - To update events
  - To plan school routines and staffing to accommodate funeral/memorial services and make the appropriate communications.
2. Convey updates/plans to staff at morning briefing.
3. Continue the Crisis Centre facilities and support provisions as necessary.

## NEXT 3 TO 4 WEEKS

1. Arrange a memorial service at the school, preferably within two weeks of the incident. Encourage close friends and others directly involved in the incident to participate and be involved in the planning. Decisions regarding memorial services must be based on the circumstances at the time. (A memorial service may be counterproductive in the case of student suicide in romanticising the action.)
2. Convene a meeting of parents of students directly involved in the incident in order to encourage parents to:
  - Express and share their feelings and concerns about their children's welfare.
  - Help them understand their children's reactions.
3. Encourage staff to be alert for signs of significant persistent changes in behaviour of those affected by the incident.
4. Monitor the progress of hospitalised students, ensuring continued access to counselling support on discharge and on the return to school.
5. Monitor the mental and physical health and stress levels of staff, students and caregivers. Organise a debriefing of Crisis team, guidance counsellors and support personnel. (specifics re: contacting GSE, victim support & application to MOE for crisis funding)
6. Monitor the mental and physical health needs and stress levels of guidance counsellors and support personnel.
7. Monitor the need for courses on crisis resolution, stress management and understanding grief.

## In the Longer Term

- Remain alert for and sensitive to the disturbing influences of anniversaries, inquests, legal proceedings (suicide may be an option for peers on these anniversaries).
- Monitor staff for signs of undue stress (negotiate counselling, special leave or other provisions as necessary).
- Organise an Evaluation and Debriefing of the incident and crisis by the Crisis and Administration Teams.
- Organise Survivors Group/Peer Support as necessary.
- Make procedural changes to Crisis Plan and address skills/knowledge deficits, eg In-Service Training if necessary.

## Related Policies

- Health & Safety
- EOTC

## Appendices

- One Suicide Action Plan
- Two Crisis Categories & Level of Response
- Three Sample parent Letter
- Four Co-ordination of Crisis team & Administration team – checklist
- Five Teachers - checklist

## **Appendix One**

### **SUICIDE RESPONSE PLAN**

#### **Purpose**

While suicide happens at a relatively low rate in the population at large, it is a challenging event for any community to face. Suicide is also a highly emotive topic and, if a suicide occurs, the reactions can be extreme and are often damaging. One such reaction of particular concern is the so called “copy-cat syndrome” or “suicide virus” or “cluster suicides” – suicides by other vulnerable individuals in the days following a suicide.

To minimise the negative consequences of a suicide a planned response will be valuable. The Ministry of Education Preventing and Responding Toolkit and Response Team will be considered as part of any response.

#### **Action**

In the event of a student suicide, the Schools Crisis Action Plan will be followed. There are however some special considerations –

- Avoidance of assembly situations (this depends on the form level involved ~~~ special small assemblies are best).
- Contact the MOE “Traumatic Incident Team” (0800 848326)
- Avoid speculation about the cause and means of death.
- Monitor what is being said about the death on social media.
- Consider setting up a “support room”.
- Plan for a meeting of all staff as soon as possible.
- Attempted or completed suicides may follow a suicide of death by other means – “to be with their friend”.
- Schools need to be alert to students displaying possible suicidal warning signs up to a year after a traumatic incident – staff made aware of common warning signs and guidelines. Referral made for Evaluation of Suicide Risk.
- Post suicide strategies focus heavily on –
  - The return to normality within the school
  - Providing opportunities for students/staff to begin the process of resolving their grief
  - Helping people come to terms with the event
- Provide guidelines to staff for handling classroom discussion. Avoid romanticising the victim or making them an heroic figure.
- Family contact situation should –
  - provide support/assess the appropriate level of school involvement
  - negotiate with family about what information the school discloses.
  - deflect scapegoating of the school, but remain sympathetic
  - assess the need for support from appropriate services
  - support their need for a ceremony and consider the wellbeing of the wider school population.
  - provide the opportunity for a “psychological autopsy” to find out what precipitating factors existed and whether the school contributed to these

- More intensive work (talking about the person, ways of expressing their feelings and how they can support each other, a session on grief and grieving) should be encouraged, especially with the form class.
- Monitor or assess persisting behaviours which may indicate a need for specialist counselling.
- Identify and monitor students at risk

## Appendix Two

### Categories of Crisis

Category	Examples		Response Team
<b>1</b>	<b>Parent</b> Serious illness / relationship breakdown <b>Student</b> Mental or physical illness	<b>Accidents/incidents</b> Student/staff injury on site.	Leadership Team
<b>2</b>	<b>Parent</b> Death by suicide, homicide, accident <b>Student</b> Serious illness	<b>Emergency</b> Fire / Earthquake .. damage to some rooms	Leadership Team
<b>3</b>	<b>Student</b> Serious injury/trauma	<b>Emergency</b> Fire/earthquake. damage to rooms.	Crisis Team
<b>4</b>	<b>Student</b> Death by accident	<b>Emergency / Disaster</b> Earthquake/fire damage & injuries.	Crisis Team
<b>5</b>	<b>Student</b> Death by suicide, homicide	<b>Emergency / Major Disaster</b> Earthquake substantial damage/injuries Civil Defence Level	Crisis Team

### Level of Response

- Whole School
- Boarding House
- Year Level
- Form Level
- Individual

## Appendix Three

### A SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS FROM THE HEADMASTER

School Letterhead

Date

Dear Parents

Yesterday two of our 6<sup>th</sup> Form students were tragically killed and two others injured during a sudden storm at the Outdoor Education Camp at Lake Jerrybone. The students were struck by a sheet of roofing iron from an abandoned farmhouse as they sheltered in their tent.

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were killed instantly. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ received a broken arm and broken ribs respectively and were discharged from hospital after an overnight stay.

I have visited the parents of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and offered them the condolences of our whole school community together with any support or help we are able to give.

Your sons and daughters may be affected by the deaths of our students and we have made some plans to provide support for them at school if needed. I will advise you further of these shortly.

It would be best for school routine to continue as normally as possible and students should attend school regularly. Reactions of students will vary and may include crying, not wanting to talk, or wanting to talk, wanting to be alone, anger, lack of concentration, sleeping or eating problems. Should you or your child feel the need for professional help or counselling, please contact me or the guidance counsellors, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, who will be able to advise on procedures.

Yours sincerely

HEADMASTER

This letter has five functions. It tells parents:

1. the facts
2. what the school has done
3. the school's plans
4. how the children may react
5. how to get help



**Appendix Four**

**CO-ORDINATION OF CRISIS TEAM & ADMINISTRATION TEAM – CHECKLIST**

1. **Level of Response** (choose which level)  
 Whole School  
 Form Level  
 Form  
 Individual

2. **Crisis Team**

**Administration Team**

<b>(a) Team Leaders</b>	<b>: OE/KL/HE//JD/FD/RL</b>	<b>(a) Team Leaders</b>	<b>TK/KL/JD/HE</b>
<b>(b) Tasks</b>	<b>Allocated to</b>	<b>(b) Tasks</b>	<b>Allocated to</b>
Verify information		Daily Strategy: Teaching Staff Briefing, situation/plan	
Brief to teachers – Situation, plan informing Students		Attendance/roll checks	
Brief Office/NTS/ Teaching Staff		Crisis Room place/ staffing	
Crisis Room Plans		Locate absent students	
Deceased’s form class			
Contact with family (including funeral)		<b>Staffing:</b> List all staff absent (sick, in service, EOTC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List relieving teacher of above</li> <li>• List teachers able to cover any class attended</li> <li>• Arrange cover for teachers unable to perform tasks</li> </ul>	
Contact with outside Professionals		<b>Funeral:</b> List teachers – Classes – students attending funeral <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List &amp; communicate plans for funeral.</li> <li>• Arrange support &amp; transport for students</li> <li>• List cover for teachers attending funeral.</li> </ul>	
Contact other schools			
Media			
Police			
Letter to parents: 1) explain the situation 2) funeral plans			
List best friends/other Affected			

## CRISIS PLAN

### *Checklist for Teachers*

Day: .....

Send this to: .....

1. Explain the situation
2. Describe the help available - write this on the board and leave all day.  

In school	-	Counsellors
	-	Crisis Room
Out of School	-	Youthline
	-	NAHB Counsellors
	-	SES Counsellors
	-	Private counselling
3. List absent students  
Mark unexplained absences
4. List other students who appear affected
5. List students referred to Crisis Centre  
(Do not make judgements at this stage)
6. What other help does your class require at this stage?  
(Do not neglect yourself in this question)
7. Funeral - List students wanting to attend  
- List those needing transport
8. Letter sent to parents  

1)	The situation/school plan
2)	Funeral plans/permission

***Teacher Comments:***