Managing School
EMERGENCIES

MINIMISING THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON STAFF AND STUDENTS
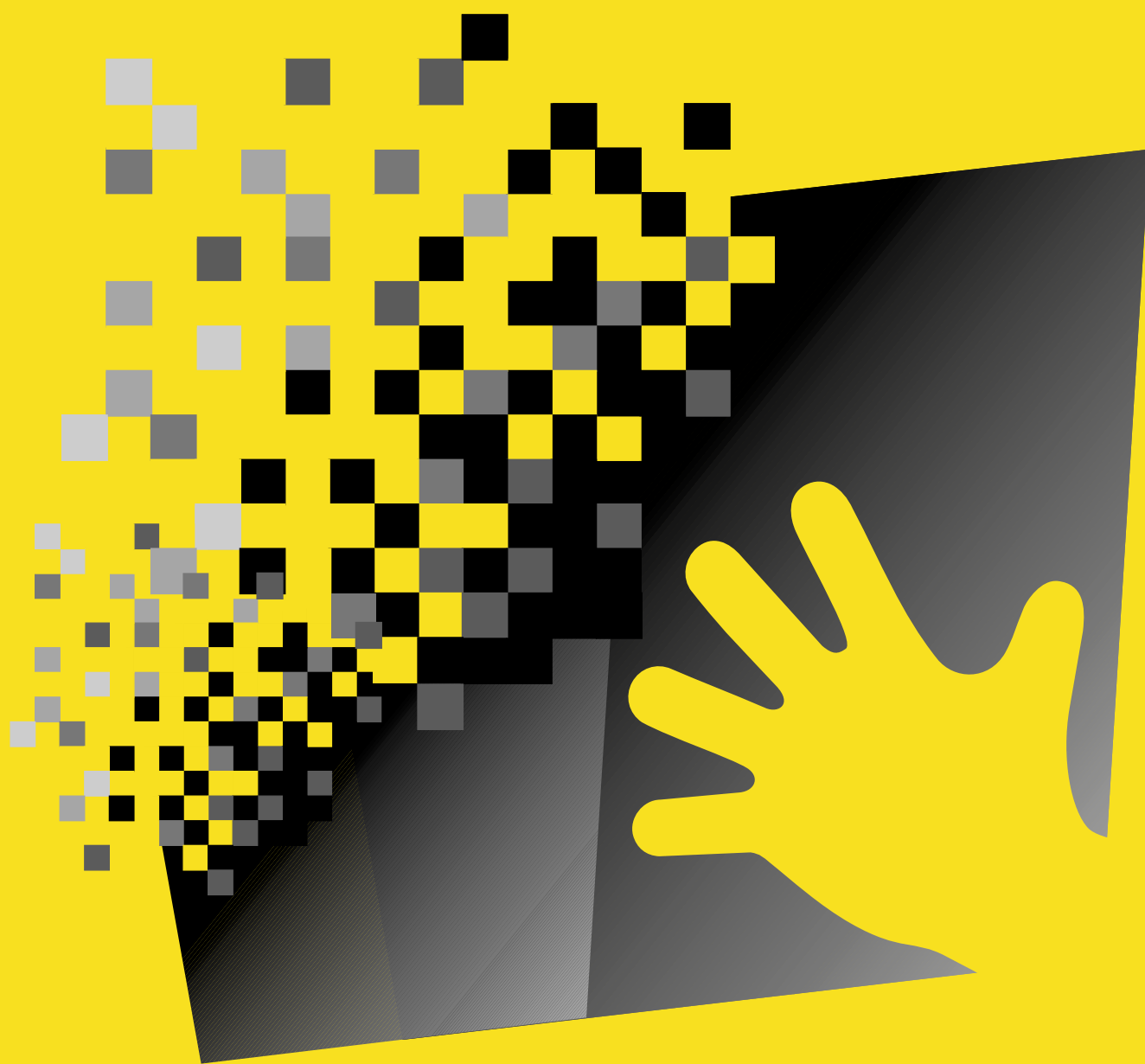
Acknowledgments

The information contained in *Managing School Emergencies* incorporates a wealth of knowledge and experience of many individuals in schools and specialist Department of Education, Employment and Training support staff who have effectively managed emergencies.

Michelle Roberts, a Department of Education, Employment and Training guidance officer, has made a significant contribution to the field of knowledge concerning the management of trauma in schools following emergencies. Michelle's major contribution to the recovery and trauma management sections of the publication is gratefully acknowledged.

Penny Storey and Alec Hamilton also contributed their specialist knowledge to the development of this publication.

Foreword

Managing School Emergencies provides a comprehensive resource to help schools meet their emergency planning obligations. It incorporates the revised Department of Education Emergency Management Plan, and supersedes the *Emergency Management Manual* which was previously issued to schools. *Managing School Emergencies* will assist schools to maintain an up-to-date emergency management plan which meets statutory planning and duty of care obligations. *Managing School Emergencies* is intended to provide a single emergency reference resource for schools.
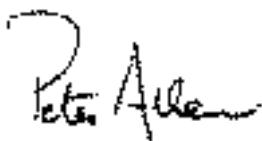
It explores key issues which school planners need to know. These key issues include the fundamental emergency management elements dealing with the prevention of, preparedness for, response to and recovery from emergencies.

Managing School Emergencies describes a range of tasks that need to be considered in the order in which they are likely to arise during an emergency. These are included in checklists and information pages describing who should be notified and when, how to inform students and staff, ways of keeping parents informed and how to set up an emergency coordination centre. Practical advice is also provided about how to manage media issues, including the preparation of media releases and coordination of interviews.

A key aim of *Managing School Emergencies* is to reduce the impact of trauma on school communities that often accompanies exposure to an emergency. The trauma management section provides practical advice for use by school personnel from the onset of the emergency and through the first twenty-four to forty-eight hours. It also provides advice about medium- and long-term issues that may need to be addressed in the subsequent weeks or months.

The loose leaf format has been used for easy photocopying of resource pages. Some pages have been designed as checklists for use in the early stages of an emergency when the tasks to be completed may seem unending. Others, such as the pages describing how students may respond to trauma and sample letters to send to parents, have been provided to assist in timely communication with the school community.

While a school emergency plan provides a framework for the school response to an emergency, it will inevitably require modification, either as circumstances change or as a result of its application during an emergency. *Managing School Emergencies* is intended as a dynamic document to be modified and refined over time to meet the needs of individual schools.

Peter Allen
Director of Schools

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Nelson Bros, Funeral Services Pty Ltd
Bereavement Resource Centre
229 Park Street
South Melbourne Vic 3205
(03) 9696 0244

Open Leaves Bookshop
71 Cardigan Street
Carlton Vic 3053
(03) 9347 2355

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Planning to manage risks

Planning responsibility

All Department of Education, Employment and Training school and non-school workplaces are required to maintain a current emergency management plan which describes actions to be taken during and following an emergency to ensure the safety of students, staff and visitors.

Duty of care obligations require that school personnel take all reasonable steps to protect students from risks likely to cause personal injury that could reasonably have been foreseen. School councils, principals and teachers are responsible for ensuring that school-related activities are planned for, and are conducted in accordance with Department of Education, employment and Training guidelines and procedures to ensure the safety of all involved. The obligation to plan for the safe conduct of activities extends to emergencies which may arise in the course of normal school activities.

Emergency management planning

Emergency management at the workplace level refers to a comprehensive risk management process comprising four components—preparedness, prevention, response and recovery. The process culminates in the development of a workplace emergency management plan **(preparedness)**. The focus of the plan is directed towards the prevention and mitigation of emergencies **(prevention)** including trauma. Not all emergencies are preventable and, therefore, planning is also directed towards minimising the effects of emergencies which occur **(response)**. Schools have a major responsibility, including during emergencies, in supporting individuals who may be traumatised as a result of their exposure to the emergency **(recovery)**.

The effectiveness of the emergency plan will be determined by how people respond during an emergency when normal routines and procedures may be disrupted and individuals may be confused or disoriented. To ensure an effective response, staff, students and regular visitors need to know what the plan contains and what they are required to do in an emergency. The plan should include:

- the range of emergencies covered
- a site plan and general description of the workplace

Planning to manage risks

- assessment of risks and the hazards to which the workplace may be exposed
- an identified risk treatment program with funding to reduce risks
- roles and responsibilities of key personnel during an emergency
- procedures for reporting emergencies
- safety procedures to be followed by staff and students
- alternative evacuation assembly areas
- emergency services contact numbers
- measures to prevent or mitigate the effects of emergencies
- means by which recovery programs will be implemented
- endorsement by the police, fire brigade and other relevant agencies.

Emergency defined

An emergency is any sudden event which endangers or threatens to endanger the safety or health of any person or which destroys or threatens to destroy or damage property or endangers or threatens to endanger the environment or an element of the environment in Victoria. An emergency includes any incident which occurs during school hours, or after school hours, during camps, excursions or outdoor adventure activities, during travel to or from school and incidents which involve issues of negligence or legal liability. Emergencies which should be planned for include:

- fatality/suicide
- serious injury/serious assault/sexual assault
- siege/hostage/firearms
- disappearance or removal of student
- bomb threats
- collapse/major damage to building or equipment
- motor vehicle collision/impact with school
- fire in school building/bushfire
- impact by equipment/machinery/aircraft
- fumes/spill/leak/contamination by hazardous material
- outbreak of disease
- flood/wind storm or other natural event.
- witnessing or learning about traumatic events.

The actual and potential effects on individuals should be considered when planning for emergencies and developing procedures to cater for them.

Emergencies our of school

Many emergencies which occur beyond the school have the potential to seriously disrupt the lives of staff and students. When responding to an emergency, the set of arrangements for dealing with the emergency which were developed during the planning process and which appear in the workplace emergency management plan will be implemented.

Reporting emergencies

Clear procedures should be developed for reporting emergencies within the workplace. School must notify the emergency services and telephone the Department of Education, Employment and Training's twenty-four hour communications centre operated by the Emergency and Security Management Branch. Emergency contact numbers should be prominently displayed at strategic points throughout the school and in the emergency plan. It is important to check with the emergency services to obtain the telephone number which will ensure the fastest response during an emergency.

Role of the emergency services and recovery agencies

The appropriate emergency services (police, fire brigade, ambulance, State Emergency Service) should be contacted immediately when an emergency occurs. One of the emergency services will assume legal responsibility for control and coordination of response activity on arrival and will retain control until their services are no longer required.

Schools are responsible for the safety of students prior to and during any emergency, and staff should take reasonable steps to reduce the impact of the emergency prior to the arrival of the emergency services. Once the emergency services have taken responsibility for managing the emergency, school efforts should continue to be directed towards the immediate welfare of affected individuals and groups, and to providing resources or information requested by the emergency services. The school plan should describe how this will be achieved.

The Department of Human Services has primary responsibility for coordinating recovery activity following emergencies, although in most cases, responsibility for recovery from emergencies affecting schools will remain with the Department

Planning to manage risks

of Education. Department of Education psychologists and social workers have a major role in working with staff and students during emergencies and will liaise with other agencies which may be involved in providing specialist recovery services to schools. School plans should recognise the role which other agencies play during emergencies and describe arrangements for working with Department of Education, Employment and Training specialist support staff.

Responsibility of schools during an emergency

The role of the principal as the coordinator of the school's response, of senior staff, office staff, classroom teachers and students should be described in the plan along with specific responsibilities which might be required. While responsibilities may be similar for most staff, some may have specific tasks to perform such as searching store rooms or toilets during an evacuation. General and specific responsibilities should be described in the plan.

During an emergency in which staff or students are missing or injured (eg a camp or excursion), the school staff must maintain adequate supervision of remaining or uninjured students. The principal and staff retain responsibility for supervising students who are not directly involved in the emergency and this responsibility cannot be delegated to other adult helpers. The plan should describe how effective supervision will be maintained under the adverse conditions which might prevail during an emergency.

Identifying risks

An assessment should be undertaken to identify temporary, seasonal and permanent factors which will provide school planners with a three-dimensional picture of risks to which the school might be exposed. Risks should be identified at three levels: at or near ground level (buildings and grounds), below ground level (mine shafts, wells, drains, tunnels) and above ground in the surrounding airspace (airborne smoke and gases, aircraft).

The risk assessment should begin with the school buildings (as well as immediate walkways and paved areas), include the grounds (extending to the property boundary) and extend to a radius of at least three kilometres beyond the grounds. The assessment should also identify risks associated with camps, excursions and outdoor adventure activities which are conducted away from the school.

Planning for evacuation

Any decision to evacuate should be based on an assessment of the actual or potential danger at the time, if possible on the advice of the police, fire brigade or other emergency service. The decision-making process and the means by which the school will be instructed to act should be described in the school plan.

It is important that several alternative evacuation assembly areas are identified around the school including at least one site which is 1,000 metres beyond the school grounds. This will ensure the availability of a safe area regardless of the nature of the emergency or the prevailing weather conditions.

The plan should indicate how students will be supervised until the normal dismissal time, or later if necessary, and how shelter, water and toilet facilities will be provided if evacuation is required for an extended period or access to school facilities is not possible. Planning should describe the process for determining when a response to an emergency does not require evacuation.

Establishing coordination and reception centres

During an emergency, parents and others concerned for the safety of students will arrive at the school seeking information. The principal may establish a centre for coordination of emergency activity in an office or other suitable location. The coordination centre should enable staff involved in the emergency to be isolated from routine administrative tasks.

The plan should provide for the establishment of a reception and information centre in a suitable location within the school to provide information to concerned relatives and others who arrive at the school. It is important that the information centre is located some distance away from a coordination centre.

The plan should also identify locations to be used as recovery rooms for students and staff who may be traumatised by their exposure to the emergency. During large emergencies, several rooms may need to be set aside for these purposes.

Planning to manage risks

Treating risks

An important part of the school's emergency management program should focus on preventing or mitigating potential risks. The reduction or removal of potential risks and the development of safe practices for all school activities will prevent some emergencies occurring and will reduce the severity of others which occur.

A risk analysis in and around the school is likely to identify areas where preventive measures can be taken by improving housekeeping practices or by minor works, some of which may require funding. The plan should identify such works and costs and include a timetable for their completion.

Site plan

A site plan should be included in the school's emergency management plan. The site plan should show all major features including buildings, exit doors, internal roadways and access gates for emergency vehicles, supply points for gas, electricity, water, location of fire hydrants, hose reels, extinguishers, evacuation assembly areas, locations of hazardous materials. It should show the location of rooms which are to be used for emergency coordination, reception of parents and for recovery purposes. A media assembly point should also be identified. The site plan should be readily available to the emergency services during an emergency.

Dealing with staff and student trauma

Some emergencies can be extremely traumatic for those directly involved and for others who may be indirectly involved including witnesses to the event. The school plan should describe how support to individuals or groups within the school community will be provided to assist them to return to a proper level of functioning.

The plan should identify who is responsible for ensuring that the recovery needs of individuals and groups exposed to trauma are assessed. Arrangements for using Department of Education, employment and Training trauma specialists should be described. In conjunction with regional recovery management arrangements, the plan should provide an overview of the process to be followed in obtaining specialist recovery support.

Additional recovery support is available to staff and DEET student services personnel through Emergency and Security Management Branch.

Training

All staff should be familiar with the location of fire alarms and firefighting equipment and should be regularly exercised in their use. Staff and students should take part in regular emergency exercises which test reporting, responding and evacuation procedures within the school. All staff, including emergency teachers, should be familiar with emergency procedures and drills. Drills and exercises should be conducted regularly. It is important that the plan be comprehensive and that training is not restricted to conducting fire drills. Staff and students should be trained to respond to those emergencies which a school is most likely to encounter.

Endorsement of the plan

Once the plan has been completed, the police and the fire brigade should be requested to examine it to ensure that the procedures developed by the school are consistent with safe and accepted practice. Their endorsement on the front cover of the plan provides confirmation of its appropriateness for implementation during an emergency. The plan should also be discussed with Department of Education, Employment and Training psychologists and social workers who will be involved in working with the school during an emergency and with other agencies likely to be involved in recovery efforts, such as the Department of Human Services.

Planning to manage risks

Planning to deal with emergencies

Some events are readily characterised as emergencies. Major emergencies demand a full scale response involving external support from the emergency services and range of agencies. Other events may be less severe or may require a response which can be managed using school resources. Principals and teachers who have responsibilities to fulfil under the school emergency management plan should assess each incident carefully. Many types of emergencies will be similar, but the circumstances in which they occur will usually be different. Each event should be considered according to the circumstances at the time to determine the appropriate level of response.

It is important that school personnel accurately assess the impact of the event on the school community. Assessing the emotional impact of an event, the extent to which school routines are destabilised and the numbers of students, staff and parents who have been affected will assist in determining the level of response required.

It is also important to confirm with colleagues or with specialists who are trained in trauma management, that an apparently minor event does not require any particular action before declaring that no one has been affected or requires support. It is often difficult for school personnel who do not have specialist training in this area to independently assess the impact of an event on others.

A planned process in which prevention, response and recovery activity is well coordinated, can reduce the impact of an emergency. A well thought out and documented school emergency management plan helps to bring a measure of control and order to an emergency. The measure of calm which pre-planned procedures bring to an event can, in turn, influence individual or group's perceptions about whether it is traumatic or not.

A well-written plan should describe how school personnel will respond to an immediate threat during an emergency. The emergency itself, and the threat to physical safety is typically short lived, often lasting minutes or a few hours.

Planning for an emergency should provide for the psychological safety and wellbeing of staff and students as well as their physical safety. The plan should describe how the school will assist those affected to recover from their involvement or exposure to the emergency.

Pre-planning provides a framework for response and recovery that enables a logical course of action to be taken at a time when the school's decision makers will be involved in the hectic activity and confusion which often accompanies an emergency. It allows support mechanisms to be implemented quickly. It helps school personnel to manage activity, rather than letting activity manage the event.

An effective and total response requires the development of an emergency management plan which will facilitate:
- *the best response at a time of emotional turmoil*
- *a sense of responsibility and control over situations which might arise*
- *recovery under difficult circumstances*
- *return to regular routine*
- *a sense of cohesiveness within the school community*
- *a demonstration of caring and support at a time of need.*

(Responding to Critical Incidents in Schools. NSW Department of School Education.)

Planning to deal with emergencies

Acknowledge the emergency

Some school administrators or teachers may be reluctant to pre-plan for emergencies. Some argue that it is better to talk down or restrict discussion about an event in the mistaken belief that its impact may be reduced by not acknowledging that it has occurred. It is extremely important for the effective management of an emergency and the subsequent wellbeing of those involved that all events are dealt with and not simply ignored. All emergencies need to be acknowledged. Those who have been involved need truthful reassurance about what has happened to them.

The school should plan to involve Department of Education, Employment and Training psychologists and social workers with specialist expertise in trauma assessment where any doubt exists about the impact of an emergency. An inappropriate assessment by school personnel which prevents those affected from receiving specialist support, is likely to be reflected in more serious problems which become evident some weeks or months later.

Some may believe that it is not possible to pre-plan for emergencies because each emergency is different and requires a different response. Each emergency will be unique and will occur in different circumstances. However, there are a number of features common to all emergencies for which pre-planned arrangements can be developed. Common pre-planned arrangements could include:

- roles and responsibilities
- notification and reporting arrangements
- actions to identify the level of risk
- actions required to maintain the safety of those involved
- liaison with emergency services and other agencies
- assessment of impact of event on those involved.

Developing a school emergency plan

There are some general rules of thumb in developing a comprehensive school emergency management plan. This chapter outlines the main areas for consideration when developing the school's emergency management policy and procedures. In developing a school's plan, which includes prevention, response and recovery arrangements, consider the following tasks for inclusion.

Rationale and aims

It helps to first identify what you are trying to achieve with the plan. Schools which have a plan to work by when an emergency occurs are more likely to meet the needs of their community best. Pre-planning which provides for a coordinated response helps to minimise the incidence of traumatic stress.

It is important that those who are to implement the plan are involved in developing it. The plan should be developed in consultation with all sections of the school community.

The more promptly recovery activity is commenced, the more likely it is to be effective. It is often possible to begin recovery activity while the emergency is still underway. Where this is not practicable, initial intervention following should occur within one to three days if it is to be effective.

A good plan will assist in the establishment of a good recovery management program. This will help in the recovery of affected individuals and facilitate the speedy return of school routine.

Developing a school emergency plan

Developing a school emergency plan

Establishing a team

$\mathbf{T}$he first step in developing a school emergency management plan is to bring together a team of people who will take on the planning tasks and its implementation during an emergency. The planning team, involving members of the school community, should be responsible for policy development, prevention measures, response procedures, identifying roles and responsibilities, recovery arrangements, plan review and evaluation.

Consider these key points in developing the plan:

- who will be directly involved in organising and providing support within the school following a traumatic incident and what will be their roles

- who will have specific responsibility for coordinating response activity

- what mechanisms can be devised for implementing the emergency management plan and for ensuring procedures are actually adhered to

- what outside agencies may be used to assist in the recovery program

- what procedures will be necessary to ensure that personnel and student medical records are current for use in an emergency

- how can the mental health of those in care giving roles be protected

- what provision has been made for care givers

- would there be circumstances where the local emergency services would be required to be involved with the school

- what protocols would be involved in liaising with other agencies

- what emergency management training is required for staff.

It is essential that those who provide treatment and other interventions following trauma have a thorough understanding of the reactions of children and adults and their treatment needs.

Key elements in an emergency management plan

Prevention	Preparedness	Response	Recovery
The identification of risks that are specific to the school community environment.	The planning and rehearsal of processes to be undertaken when an emergency occurs.	Implementing planned procedures to ensure the ongoing safety of the school community.	Implementation of recovery processes to facilitate the return to routine. The review of the plan.
• risk identification • safe practice • occupational safety • school regulations • security	• planning • rehearsal • education • training • role definition • action plans • liaising with emergency services	• coordinate response • rescue • safety • first aid • communication • liaising with agencies • liaising with DEET • adjusting and maintaining school functioning • managing the media	• coordinate recovery • collect information • recovery room • communications • managing media • monitor reactions • resumption of regular routine • counselling • memorials • review of existing plan

Prevention and mitigation

- identify and note the risks to which the school may be exposed and the extent to which a bushfire, assault in school grounds, toxic spill, car park accident, school camp injury, school bus incident, urban emergency such as a siege or train crash creates a hazard

- identify safe practices to ensure that they comply with school safety regulations, occupational and work-related guidelines

- prepare a list of emergency contact for essential services including police, fire, ambulance, hospital, doctor and the Department of Education, Employment and Training's twenty-four-hour emergency communications centre.

Key elements in an emergency plan

Key elements in an emergency plan

Response and recovery

Identify:

- first-aid requirements
- roles of key personnel
- alternative means of communications
- locations for an emergency coordination centre, a recovery room for those affected, alternative evacuation assembly areas
- who will be responsible for ensuring compliance with legal requirements
- develop a strategy for managing media issues and nominate a spokesperson
- immediate actions required following notification of an emergency
- agencies to be notified including the Department of Education's twenty-four-hour communications centre
- responsibilities of staff and students
- possible members of an emergency management team such as:

chaplain	school nurse
principal/assistant principal	teachers
administrative support/ancillary staff	business manager
regional principal consultant	student welfare coordinator
guidance officers/social workers	year-level coordinators.

Describe arrangements for:

- separating emergency responsibilities from ongoing routine responsibilities
- allocating emergency responsibilities to staff
- gathering information about the incident
- managing verbal and written information
- informing: staff, students, parents
- providing situation reports to Department of Education, Employment and Training officers
- the provision of counselling and trauma services
- coordinating school involvement in funeral arrangements and memorials
- liaising with outside agencies
- maintaining normal school routines and activities
- managing media issues.

Review

- review and revise existing plan within two years
- update the plan following any significant emergency.

Fundamental issues
The recovery environment

The effectiveness of the recovery environment depends on:

*   how much factual information is provided about the event and its effects
*   the nature of reactions and extent of support provided by parents
*   the reactions and support provided by teachers
*   the extent to which the school provides a supportive environment
*   whether the significance of the event is confirmed by others
*   the support provided by friends and others
*   the nature of the family climate
*   the extent to which specialist intervention and support is available.

Identifying likely risks

Identify the types of emergencies which might give rise to traumatic stress in the school setting. Consider the risks that are most likely to affect the school (ie bush fire, bus crash, suicide).

Pre-planning includes preparation of resources to be used during an emergency. Staff and students should be familiar with the types of emergencies likely to be encountered and how to protect themselves from harm (ie identifying structurally sound places for evacuation assembly and alternative routes for escape in a sniper attack).

Communication

Plan to use alternative emergency communications in the event that normal telephones break down or become congested. Consider the use of silent lines within the school, cellular telephones, pagers or radios.

Identify who will provide administrative support during the emergency including answering of telephone queries from the school community, media enquiries, requests from police and the emergency services.

Devise mechanisms to manage the increased telephone calls, visitors, paper work and appointments. Plan for the workload to double. School routines will need to continue as much as possible while emergency responsibilities need to be fulfilled.

Fundamental issues

Possible responses

Consider how those affected are likely to react

Consider how different groups within the school community may react. Students, teachers, parents and support staff will have different needs and may react accordingly. Consider the impact on different cultural groups and on students from non-English-speaking families.

Identify those who are affected and need support

Account for everyone who was at the school during the incident, noting the type of exposure. Track any students who were released to the care of guardians or parents during the emergency. Children may be anxious about the whereabouts of brothers or sisters. Identify students and staff who may be affected by the event or by hearing of the event.

Track the location of students and staff during the rescue effort

In the turmoil following an emergency, it is important that school personnel record the location of anyone who is taken from the site for medical care or other purposes. When death or injury is a factor, trying to find the whereabouts of a student can be a significant stressor during an emergency.

Consider how, when and where parents and children are to be reunited. The child's first sight of a parent may cause relief, or may escalate stress in response to seeing the fear and anxiety on a parent's face. Try to find a venue which is comfortable, near toilets and provides a degree of privacy. Consider providing tissues and drinks. To minimise the stress reaction, parents may require a brief transition period during which they can be assisted by staff to compose themselves before they join their children.

Emergencies and trauma
Is it an Emergency?

The response to an emergency and an assessment of the need for recovery activity should not be determined by whether the event is described as an incident, emergency or disaster. The key to providing an effective response relies on the event being defined in terms of its impact on people. Victorian legislation defines events typically experienced by schools as **emergencies**. The Department of Education, Employment and Training's emergency management plan uses the same terminology. For simplicity and consistency this publication uses the same terminology.

An **emergency** is an unforeseen occurrence; a sudden and urgent occasion for action. It includes events that are likely to significantly affect the physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing of staff and students. It also includes events which may be described variously as a disaster, a traumatic event, an incident or a critical incident. An emergency that is likely to affect the physical or psychological well being or staff and students may occur outside of school hours within the wider community.

An emergency may also be a **traumatic** event. A traumatic event may include any situation faced by members of a community which causes them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions or one which has the potential to interfere with their ability to function, either at the time, or later. Emergencies, including traumatic events can be experienced alone, with others or as part of a broader community based experience.

Principals of Government schools have an obligation under Victoria's emergency management legislation to plan for, and respond to, emergencies affecting schools. Principals have a **duty of care** responsibility to ensure that the physical, psychological and emotional safety of students and staff is maintained during and following emergencies.

The Department of Education requires all schools to develop and maintain an up-to-date emergency management plan which includes response and recovery arrangements for individuals or groups within the school community who have been affected by an emergency.

An emergency does not end once the physical safety of individuals has been assured or when the emergency services have gone home. The psychological and emotional wellbeing of staff and students becomes the focus of activity when coordinating recovery activity during an emergency.

Emergencies and trauma

Characteristics of traumatic events

Traumatic incidents tend to have characteristics in common. They:

- are extremely dangerous or distressing
- are sudden and unexpected, providing no opportunity to prepare for them
- disrupt one's sense of control of events around them
- disrupt one's beliefs and assumptions about the world, people and work
- challenge the belief that the world is a fair and equitable place
- challenge the belief that events can be understood
- include elements of physical or emotional loss or risk of loss.

The Year 9 child

Jobe is a happy, sensitive boy who is an above average student. The day that the bushfires began, his father came to the school and took him to his grandmother's house, away from the fire zone. Jobe's parents explained to him that the fire was likely to have burnt their house but due to the ferocity of the fire, they were unable to check at the time. Jobe found it hard to believe and was very distressed at the thought that his pets may have been lost.

Jobe's parents left him with his grandparents and returned to the scene of the fires to assist in the fire fighting. That night they returned with news that their house was still standing and that one of the dogs had survived with some burns but the other had perished.

After the fire Jobe went to school as usual. There were other children and staff who had losses or near misses during the fires, yet no one really seemed aware of the impact of this experience. Many teachers didn't know who had been affected and those teachers who had been affected themselves were finding it difficult to continue with their teaching load and manage their personal lives.

Jobe found that he couldn't concentrate on his work. One teacher criticised his assignment, making scathing comments on it about lack of preparation and research and the ad hoc approach to the task. Life had changed dramatically for Jobe.

Jobe didn't say much to his parents. He didn't tell them about the teacher's comments, or his difficulties in concentrating and sleeping. Similarly, he didn't tell them that he had been fearful that he would never see them again when they left him at his grandparents' house to fight the fires. He missed his dog and felt sorry for Midge with his burnt feet and mournful look.

School personnel are required to respond effectively and efficiently to emergencies which affect their school community. Emergencies which school personnel may be expected to deal with include:

- the murder or serious injury of a student or staff member

- suicide of a teacher or student

- sexual or physical assault

- acts of violence or threats of violence

- death of a student from a terminal illness

- siege, hostage, abduction, missing student

- diagnosis of a life threatening illness of a teacher

- physically destructive events such as fire, flood, lightning, windstorm

- excursion injury from fall or cliff collapse

- mandatory report of abuse of a student

- the cumulative effect of a series of small scale incidents

- media coverage of a sensitive issue

- serious injury or death resulting from a motor vehicle collision.

Each of these emergencies has the potential to create traumatic reactions in individuals within the school community. It is possible for people to be traumatised even if they were not directly involved in the emergency. In other instances, while many people may have witnessed or been involved in the emergency, only one person may have been traumatised by it. A person who is exposed to an emergency which is extraordinary, dangerous or sudden and who perceives the emergency to be traumatic, may feel overwhelmed and out of control and may develop acute stress or a traumatic reaction.

Characteristics of traumatic events

Trauma and the individual

Trauma and the individual

Under normal circumstances, people feel that they have control over their lives and are safe from physical harm. Individuals are said to be traumatised when they experience a range of stress responses from the memory of an event which has shattered normal feelings of safety and their sense of control over their lives. The extent to which a particular event has an impact on an individual depends to some extent on how much it alters normal feelings of safety and control over what has happened.

Trauma may arise from:
• direct exposure
• witnessing the emergency
• hearing about it.

When trauma is experienced alone, an individual may feel:
• helpless
• terrorised
• tearful
• vulnerable.

Groups of people may be affected by the additional pressure to respond in a certain manner. Members of a community may have to contend with the additional damage that rumours can cause. When trauma affects an entire community, secondary stressors may develop and further traumatise individuals. The impact on, and loss of, the school community, teacher reactions, and parent reactions are all secondary stressors which may further add to the trauma experience for students.

Individual responses

Students and teachers who have been directly involved in an emergency are **primary level victims** and are at risk from reactions caused by the emergency. Children who have been involved peripherally or by association may also be vulnerable and are also at risk of reactions. They form a **secondary group**. These include children who have family or friends involved in the emergency or whose school community has been affected or for whom the emergency arouses previous experiences. (Wraith, 1995)

Individual characteristics may influence the way in which a student, teacher or parent responds to an emergency such as:

- experience of the event
- interpretation of the event
- gender
- previous experiences
- personality
- relationship to those affected
- existence of support network
- personal beliefs about death
- age and maturity
- coping mechanisms.

Janelle heard at school assembly that a child in Year 2 had been approached by a strange man on her way to the toilets. The principal warned everyone to be careful, to go to the toilets in pairs and not to speak to strangers. She listened carefully and told her parents about the special assembly when she got home.

Her friend Julie listened to the special assembly too, went home as usual but didn't say anything to her parents. That night she was unusually restless and in the morning Julie had a stomach ache and stayed home from school. Julie became increasingly reluctant to go to school. Her parents were surprised at the change in her attitude to school but didn't like to force her when she did seem a bit unwell.

When they did send her to school, it was not unusual for the first-aid duty teacher to call before recess for Julie to be picked up because she had vomited. The doctor could find nothing physically wrong with Julie. Julie didn't tell them about the strange man and the child in Year 2.

Individual responses

Mapping trauma in an emergency

Emergency

Significant, managed

Individual's perception

Intervention can influence the individual's perception of the emergency

Overwhelming, out of control, extraordinary, dangerous, sudden

Significant, managed

Traumatic

Not traumatic

Trauma response

Not managed

Post-traumatic stress disorder
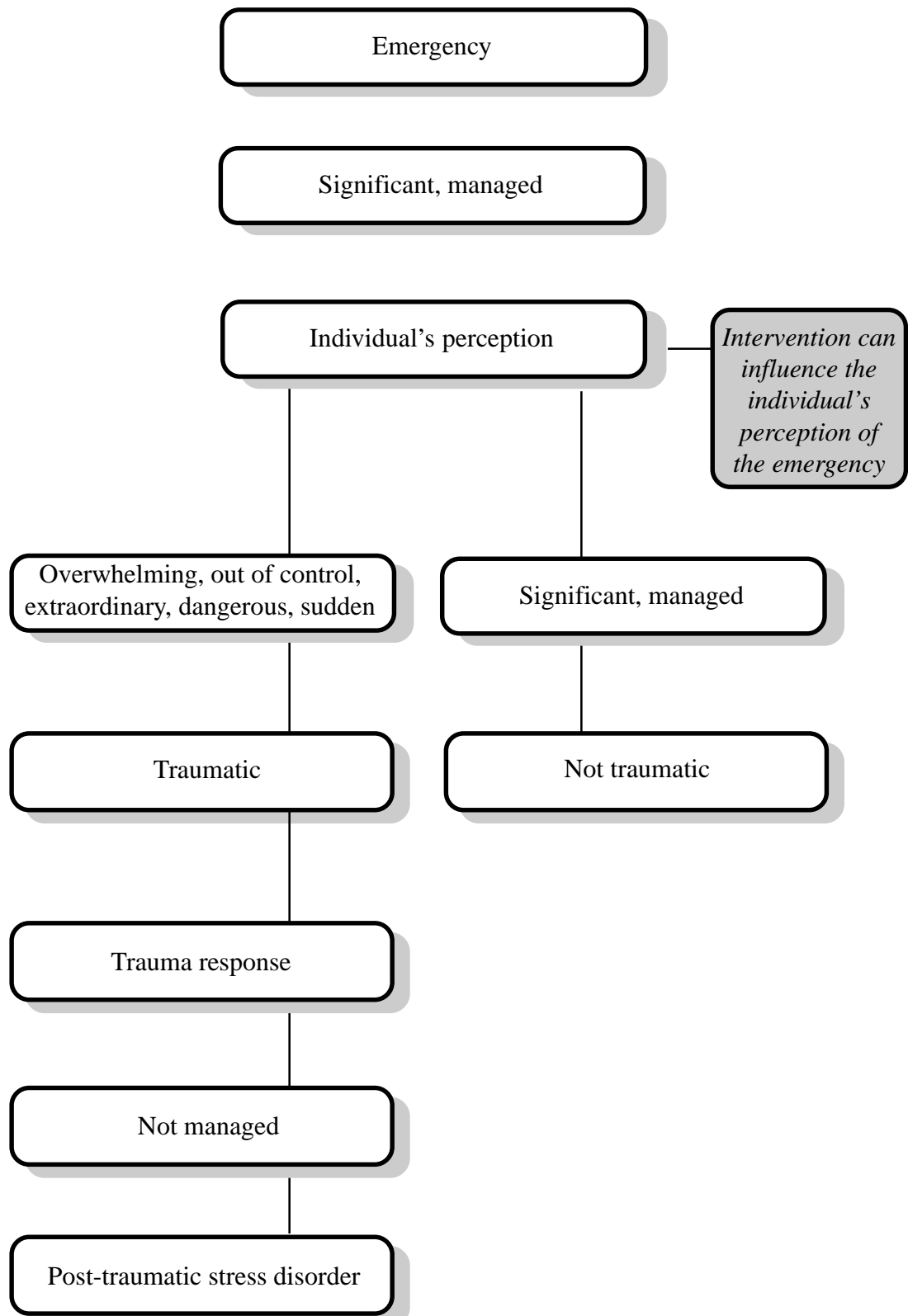
Some common reactions to trauma

School personnel and others may experience strong emotional responses during an emergency. It is important for principals and teachers to constantly assess the impact of the emergency on themselves and others. It is equally important to take conscious and deliberate steps to minimise the impact of any response which is likely to reduce personal or work performance.

Principals and teachers may be affected directly by their exposure to the emergency. They may also be affected because of their close association with other staff or students who have been affected. Some staff may be directly involved in the activity to resolve the emergency, while others may be expected to re-establish and maintain school routines, leaving the direct management of emergency activity to others.

Anyone who is directly or indirectly involved in an emergency, including teachers, ancillary staff, children, families and those with helping roles may experience one or several common reactions to trauma. Many people report feeling **switched on** and in a state of readiness to react to a potential threat at all times. This is one of many normal trauma responses which may include:

- over reaction to minor issues
- disorganised thought processes
- sleep disturbance
- general anxiety
- anxiety
- impaired memory storage.

The reactions may be reflected in:

- a tendency for an all or nothing response
- difficulty experienced by a class teacher in concentrating and in managing the day-to-day tasks of teaching
- loss of confidence or self-esteem, difficulty in making decisions
- intrusive nightmares and thoughts about the event
- reassessment of the meaning of life goals and values
- the use of coping mechanism such as social withdrawal, alcohol, drugs, major life changes, which may in fact worsen the situation and impede recovery.

Common reactions to trauma

Helpful hints: Looking after yourself

Hints for teachers and principals

Be prepared

- familiarise yourself with the contents of the school's emergency plan

- learn about reactions that may be experienced by helpers in this area

- be aware that you may experience reactions similar to those of people who have directly experienced the trauma such as sadness, anger, helplessness, and anxiety.

When it happens

- be aware that working with traumatised people can trigger memories of loss and trauma in your own life

- it's okay to say 'no' to doing specific emergency tasks. Working in this area should be voluntary

- do not get directly involved in **emergency** work if you do not feel able to. Assist with administrative work, teaching duties, help to restore normal school routines

- try to stay calm

- clarify your responsibilities during the emergency

- pace yourself knowing that you may be involved for days or even weeks and that emergency work can be time consuming and drain your energy

- monitor media coverage to understand how the general community and the school is reacting to the event

- ensure that confidential information about others is not discussed

- talk through your experiences with someone you trust during the emergency and use available support mechanisms to avoid becoming traumatised yourself.

During and following an emergency make a conscious effort to:

- rest more than usual to counter the extra drain on your energy which working during the emergency will cause

- contact friends and increase time with people whose company you enjoy

- stay with someone for a few hours or, if possible, a few days

- maintain as normal a schedule as possible

- reduce the intake of such stimulants as tea, coffee, alcohol and chocolate, which will assist in keeping arousal levels within a manageable range

- eat well-balanced, regular meals, even if you don't feel like it—carbohydrates such as pasta may slow down arousal rates

- maintain a reasonable level of activity, including exercise routines

- use relaxation activities to assist in lowering arousal levels

- talk to trusted people, don't bottle things up

- use your support networks at home and at school

- consider talking to trauma specialists.

Self care is vital. Plan your self-care and include pleasant things in your day.

Helpful hints: Looking after yourself

Common reactions to traumatic events

Common reactions to traumatic events
in the pre-school years

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Sleep disturbance

Bowel and bladder difficulties

Small ailments requiring comforting

Acute awareness of things and events

General arousal

Increased jumpiness and uneasiness

IMPACT ON THINKING

Reduced attention span

Reduced ability to play constructively

Active fantasy life, may replay the event and change details

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

Tearfulness

Unwillingness to be left alone

Aggression

Fearfulness

Anxiety

Overactive behavior/restlessness

Apathy

Lack of cooperation

Irritability

Return to younger behavior

Excessive concern for others

Difficulty coping with change

Display of awareness of events beyond age expectations, particularly in play

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

Provide support, rest, comfort

Provide a structured environment where the rules are clear

Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event

Provide time to draw and play

Provide ongoing, consistent care

Provide a predictable routine

Provide security and reassurance to counter separation anxiety

Monitor the child and note any change in temperament and behavior

Common reactions to traumatic events in the lower primary school years

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Change in eating habits

Nausea

Sleep disturbances

Bowel and bladder problems

Clumsiness

Headaches

Small ailments requiring comforting

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

Tearfulness

Unwillingness to be left alone

Confusion

Aggression

Fearfulness

Lie telling

Anxiety

Generalised anger

Overactive behavior, restlessness

Lack of cooperation

Irritability

Return to younger behavior

Reduction in talking

Excessive concern for others

Difficulty coping with change

Display of awareness beyond age expectations

Acute awareness of things and events

Helplessness—passive responses

Difficulty identifying what is wrong

Sensitivity to media coverage

IMPACT ON THINKING

Preoccupation with trauma

Reduced attention span

Reduced ability to play constructively

Memory problems

Confusion

Seeing the event over and over

Compensatory themes in play which may involve killing the perpetrator or creating a super hero for retribution

Anxiety related to incomplete understanding of death

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

Provide support, rest, comfort

Provide a structured environment where the rules are clear

Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event

Provide time to draw and play

Provide ongoing, consistent care

Provide a predictable routine

Provide security and reassurance to counter separation anxiety

Monitor the child and note any change in temperament and behavior

Common reactions to traumatic events

Common reactions to traumatic events

Common reactions to traumatic events in the upper primary school years

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Headaches

Visual and perceptual problems

Sleep disturbances

Nausea

Skin problems

Reckless behavior

IMPACT ON THINKING

Interference with concentration and learning

Distortion of the event

Fear of ghosts

Preoccupation with the traumatic event

Impaired memory and recall

Intrusive recollections

Preoccupation with revenge

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

Preoccupation with own actions during the event

Specific fears set off by reminders or when alone

Retelling or replaying the event

Reluctance to express feelings

Concern about own and others safety

Reckless, invulnerable behavior

Interest in parents response to the event

Concern for parents recovery

Disturbed grief responses

Reluctance to disturb parents with own anxieties

Refusal to go to school

Excessive concern for victims and their families

Competition with brothers and sisters

Displaced anger, aggression

Insecurity

Regressive behavior

Failure to perform responsibilities

Emotional labelling of common reactions

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

Provide support, rest and comfort

Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event and address the distortions

Provide time to talk about events, fears, dreams

Help identify traumatic reminders and anxieties and encourage children not to generalise

Develop a supportive environment that allows the expression of anger, sadness

Confirm that these feelings are normal

Encourage support networks

Identify physical sensations felt during the event

Encourage constructive activities on behalf of injured or deceased

Help child to retain positive memories when working through intrusive traumatic memories

Provide a structured and predictable environment to provide a sense of security

Monitor the child and note any changes in temperament and behavior

Encourage child to let significant others know about the event

Common reactions to traumatic events in the adolescent/pre-adolescent years\

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Headaches

Aches and pains

Appetite disorders

Sleep disorders

Skin disorders

IMPACT ON THINKING

Recall of vivid disturbing images

Radical attitude changes

Memory disorders

Poor concentration

Cognitive distortion of the event

Preoccupation with trauma

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

Decreased school performance

Attention seeking

Rebellion at school or at home

Competition with brother or sisters

Loss of interest in usual activities

Lack of emotion

Need to repeatedly go over details of event

Detachment, shame, guilt

Fear of being labelled abnormal

Self-consciousness about emotional responses (fear and vulnerability)

Increase in self-destructive, accident prone behaviour (drugs, sexual)

Life threatening re-enactment

Premature entrance into adulthood or inhibition to leave home

Strong identification with peers

Mood swings

Need to conform with peers in response to event

Truancy

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

Provide support, rest, comfort

Provide realistic, age appropriate, information about the event

Encourage discussion of the event emphasising realistic limitations of what could have been done

Encourage peer acceptance and understanding of emotional responses

Provide information about safe ways of relieving psychological discomfort

Encourage postponing radical life decisions

Link attitude changes to the impact of the event

Acknowledge significance of event for them

Encourage support networks

Encourage constructive activities on part of injured or deceased

Help to hold on to positive memories as they work through the more intrusive traumatic events

Encourage student to let significant others know about the event

Common reactions to traumatic events

Reactions to death or loss

It is important to recognise the difference between trauma and grief. Not all situations involving loss are traumatic. The shock from a sudden death is different from the death where there has been time for preparation. Not all traumatic events involve death. A child's reactions to a sudden death are partly caused by the nature of the death, including the way the child is told about it and partly by the loss itself. Children need help in working through the traumatic aspects of death. Those who do not have the opportunity to work through them may show impaired grieving.

Pre-school/lower primary

Even though the child's concept of death is not fully developed, the child does react strongly to loss.

Children see life as gradual.

Death only happens to the old.

They do not understand that all functions of life have ceased.

Death is seen as a temporary reversible state.

Death may be attributed to any event that occurs immediately prior to the death:

- magically ie. a witch made it happen
- psychologically ie. wish someone dead.

Concern with magical controls and motivations.

Concern with how a body is treated after death as death is seen as reversible.

Children at this age may believe that a death is due to their negligence, thoughts or bad behaviour.

Children may play dead.

Children view time as cyclical and may expect the person will return to life.

Children need concrete explanations of death. Rituals and pictures support grief work.

Children are concerned with justice and injustice.

Death means when you go to sleep and can't wake up. Death means my grand-father died. They go to the graveyard. And then to up to heaven. Heaven is a pretty place with music. Then they come down again and do it all over again.
Age 5

Death is when you die. It means you get killed. Kill means someone shoots you or cuts off your head. It means people fall when they are excited. It's fading. They go to heaven. It has flowers all around it. It makes people sad because they miss them.
Age 4
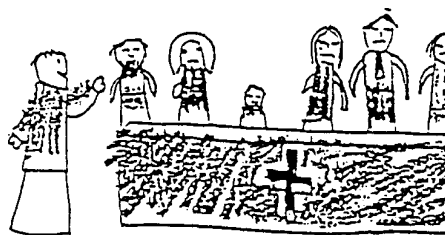
Middle/upper primary

Death may be understood as irreversible.

Causes of death may be seen to be external, eg violence, accident.

Children may focus on post death, decay and the impact of death on their lives, eg but he was in Gold House and was swimming in four events this week.

Death may be personified as skeletons or monsters.

Children focus mainly on their own feelings.

Children may *play dead.*

Pre-adolescent/adolescent/adult

Concepts concerning the personal and universal nature of death are finally developed.

Death is seen as a personal threat, but sometime in the future.

Meaning needs to be attached to the death, eg *only the good die young* and religious interpretations.

Adult understanding of death may be shared including shock, denial, guilt, bargaining and acceptance.

Understanding extends to the impact of the loss on others as well as own feelings.

Self-consciousness re-appropriateness of reaction.

I'm really scared when people start to talk about death, I mean any minute now I could die by getting hit by a car, a heart attack, disease etc ... I know a lot of people close to me that have died, like my sister, uncle, friends and cousins. It really hurts. I remember my friend Emma the day after she died we were going to go to the city, her friend rang me up and told me what had happened. I didn't believe her until I went to her funeral. That's what hurt me the most.

If I die I think I'll die of cancer or some kind of disease, or a bomb. I hope I never die. I want to live my life to the fullest. I always wonder what will happen after I'm dead, like will all my friends cry for me and talk about me. And will I come back to this world as something. And I always wonder is there a world up in Heaven or down in Hell or wherever you go when you are dead.
Shelley Age 14

When Emma died (Emma was one of our friends at school) it didn't hit for a few weeks, because every day I thought I would see her again. I'm scared to talk to people, for example, Dad (because his dad died when he was two and his mum died when he was ten) about death because I don't know what they're thinking and I don't know if I've hurt them. I'm not scared of dying because I know *it could happen one day. I'm scared that my parents would be hurt and upset. When I die, I don't want anyone to cry.*
Sonia Age 15

Reaction to death or loss

Recovery management—short-term tasks

The period during and just after notification of an emergency is often the most difficult and the most demanding. It is at this time that you will enact your school plan, contact team members and begin the recovery process.

The following checklists contain a range of prompts and are designed to provide quick answers during an emergency:

- initial emergency record

- emergency message record

- quick check telephone list

- short-term tasks within the first twenty-four hours

- setting up a recovery room

- informing staff

- staff briefing

- informing students

- informing close friends

- strategies for use in the classroom

- tips for supporting students

- informing parents and members of the school community.

Many of these checklists have been reproduced separately at the end of this document in a form which can be photocopied for immediate use during an emergency.

Initial emergency record

Date ....

Time of notification ....

Name of person taking the call ....

Position ....

Name of person reporting the incident ....

Contact telephone number ....

DETAILS (describe the incident in as much detail as possible describing who was involved, how, where and when it occurred, who is injured, nature and extent of injuries, where is everyone now, what action is being taken to help)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS REQUIRED

Principal notified   YES   NO   Time _____

Other school staff   YES   NO   Time _____

Emergency services notified   YES   NO   Time _____

(which services, record names of officers, stations, telephone contacts)

Emergency and Security Management Branch notified YES   NO   Time _____
by telephone on (03) 9589 6266

Emergency message record

Time .... Message from ....
....
Action required ☐ ....
....
Completed ☐ ....
Message taken by ....

Time .... Message from ....
....
Action required ☐ ....
....
Completed ☐ ....
Message taken by ....

Time .... Message from ....
....
Action required ☐ ....
....
Completed ☐ ....
Message taken by ....

Time .... Message from ....
....
Action required ☐ ....
....
Completed ☐ ....
Message taken by ....

Time .... Message from ....
....
Action required ☐ ....
....
Completed ☐ ....
Message taken by ....

Emergency message record

Emergency telephone contact list

Police ....

....

....

Hospital/doctor ....

....

Other emergency services ....

....

....

Essential services: water, gas ....

....

....

Key school contacts ....

....

....

....

....

Department of Education ....

Emergency and Security Management Branch ....

....

....

Neighbouring schools ....

....

....

Other community bodies ....

....

....

Emergency telephone contact list

Short-term tasks—within the first twenty-four hours

Set aside five minutes to calm down and collect your thoughts. Implement the school emergency plan. Consider the level of response that might be required, and discuss possible responses with others.

Immediate tasks

☐ notify the Emergency and Security Management Branch by telephone on (03) 9589 6266. This will ensure that the regional office is notified and that guidance officers and social workers are notified

☐ notify the emergency services using their emergency numbers

☐ ensure that staff and students are safe from injury or harm

☐ record details on the *Initial emergency record* and *Emergency message record* forms

☐ establish a school emergency team to coordinate the response

☐ allocate responsibilities to individual staff

☐ allocate responsibility for evacuation and assembly of staff and students

☐ allocate responsibility for management of information including telephone calls

☐ allocate responsibility for coordinating media requests for information

☐ allocate responsibility for provision of information parents who arrive at the school

☐ coordinate routine school activities including the teaching program

☐ notify teachers and ancillary staff about the emergency

☐ notify parents of students first, then brothers and sisters in the school

☐ establish a recovery room for affected students and a waiting room for parents

☐ inform students within the school

☐ ask for staff volunteers to monitor the recovery room

☐ actively seek information from the Department of Education, police, hospital or elsewhere

☐ inform school council

☐ inform the school community via letter or newsletter

☐ monitor school community reactions and support those in care-giving roles

☐ liaise with outside agencies, including the emergency services

☐ set aside time to brief key personnel and to review responses

Short-term tasks—setting up a recovery room

- designate a room where people know they can quickly locate support staff

- ask for a staff volunteer, preferably with first-aid knowledge, to supervise the recovery room and to support those who are very distressed

- monitor students for shock reactions and have someone available to provide first-aid if required

- set up a student recovery room well away from classrooms, or several rooms during a large incident, close to toilets and with comfortable chairs and tissues

- provide a separate recovery room for staff

- allow distressed staff members and students reasonable access to the room

- ensure that several adults are available to monitor and assist students during a large or complex incident where a large number of students may be affected

- set aside a room for parents with tea and coffee making facilities, which is separate from students to avoid having them congregate around the school

- encourage students to gather in smaller friendship groups rather than larger groups

- keep a list of students who are attending the recovery room

- give students a task to undertake such as making a card or writing a letter to the injured person as soon as practicable

- contact parents of students who remain in the recovery room and alert them about possible concerns.

Short-term tasks—informing staff

Having verified information:

- provide teachers and ancillary staff with a brief outline of the incident

- provide a brief factual outline to others within the school community on a **need-to-know** basis

- inform staff as soon as possible about a serious emergency involving death or injury which occurs after hours, on the weekend or during school holidays

- inform staff about arrangements for holding a briefing meeting before informing students at the start of the next school day.

Short-term tasks—informing staff

Short-term tasks—briefing staff

The emergency staff meeting presents an opportunity to provide known facts, dispel rumours and to establish a common reference base. It also provides an opportunity to outline the preliminary recovery management arrangements.

Before the start of the school day

*   verify and restate factual information about the incident, so that staff can understand what has happened and the information will **sink in**
*   talk with staff about the reactions they may experience
*   outline recovery management arrangements
*   inform staff about procedures for dealing with the media
*   discuss procedures to be followed by staff during the day
*   discuss guidelines for informing their students and ways of answering questions from students
*   provide teachers with a written summary for use as a reference when discussing the incident with students
*   ensure that staff have time to have their questions answered and to talk about the incident amongst themselves.

Certain teachers or staff members may require special help, for example those who were close to the victim or who had recently disciplined the deceased. These staff members should not be expected to deal with the emotional problems of students if they are having difficulty managing their own response. Those teachers who feel uncomfortable with discussing the event should be assisted by a recovery team member or a peer or have such a person inform their class for them.

At the end of the day

*   meet with staff to review the day, to allow staff to share the trauma of the day, and identify students at risk
*   ensure that school emergency team members are available to offer support and guidance.

Short-term tasks—informing students

The classroom setting enables teachers to monitor individual reactions within a supportive environment. Death, injury or other significant emergencies are usually more effectively managed in a classroom setting rather than at a general assembly or over the public address system. Teachers should establish a climate of open communication to help students work through issues such as unresolved conflicts which traumatic events may cause to resurface.

Principal or senior staff

- contact the bereaved family or police to ascertain what information may be released within the school
- prepare a factual written statement, without graphic detail, for use as a reference by teachers when discussing the incident with students.
- determine whether to tell students about the incident at a whole school assembly, by year levels or individual classes depending upon the nature of the incident
- discuss with teachers who feel uncomfortable raising the event with students and arrange for support from another teacher or a member of the recovery team
- identify staff who may be too distraught to take classes and arrange replacements from within the school, from neighboring schools or casual teachers
- inform students soon after briefing staff
- ask teachers to mark a roll to identify who has been informed and who has not.

Teachers

- provide a factual account of the incident at the beginning of the first class, in a way that ensures that everyone hears the same information
- limit speculation and rumor by providing factual and relevant information about the incident
- inform students about the location of counselling services and recovery rooms
- inform students about arrangements for memorial services, funerals and appropriate ways to express condolences
- outline arrangements for the day.

Short-term tasks—informing close friends

- notify close friends of the dead or injured, including girlfriends or boyfriends, prior to making an announcement to other students

- take students aside when they arrive at school and inform them privately

- consider contacting the students or their families at home prior to the start of the school day

- ensure that individual attention is given to intimate friends who are likely to have special needs beyond those of other students.

Short-term tasks—in the classroom

There will be wide range of reactions to the news of an incident, injury or death. Some students may be visibly affected while others may show no sign of distress. Dealing with, and responding to, news of an emergency is a very individual experience. Individual characteristics, such as how a person interprets the event, previous experiences and the relationship to the injured or deceased are all factors that influence how people will respond.

Young children and adolescents can be traumatised by what they hear from others about an incident. Use **protective interrupting** strategies if a story or details become too graphic for some students. Protective interrupting requires the teacher to stop an anecdote being told in a public forum. It may be possible to change the direction of a discussion by distracting or diverting the student. The student should be given an opportunity to tell the story in a more appropriate setting alone with the teacher.

It is useful to:

- allow opportunities to talk about the incident and reactions, taking the opportunity to explain that different people respond in different ways

- explain that a range of reactions may be experienced, that the reactions are normal, that people react in a range of ways and with time and support the reactions will ease

- repeat the facts as often as requested

- allow students to opt out of discussion

- encourage older children to talk and to piece together a clear picture of what happened

- use the natural tendency of children to repeatedly question what happened as a useful means of dispelling rumors and myths.

Short-term tasks—supporting students

When providing support to students try to:

- provide support and comfort

- sit quietly with the child, say little, accept silence

- accept initial emotional reactions

- use minimal prompts such as *"you've had a frightening experience"*

- tell children that you are sorry such an event occurred and you want to understand and assist them

- provide information about what has happened and what is being done to help

- use active listening and empathy skills

- be alert for anyone who appears to be in shock who may need medical attention

- acknowledge the experience and normalise the reactions *"you've had a frightening experience—no wonder your hands are shaking"*

- bring a calm presence to the situation

- provide ongoing support to individuals when they receive additional information such as notification of deaths, or when collecting personal effects

- ensure that support is available at home before the student leaves the scene

- be guided by the child and listen to what the individual wants

- start from the children's point of understanding

- ask children to tell you what happened in their own words

- allow opportunity for play, some children seek to get a better understanding of what happened through play

- allow children to talk over concerns with someone they have chosen, including another teacher

- respect their need for adolescents to seek support from their peer group and to be with their friends rather than with adults.

Try to avoid statements in which students are told:

*   **it will be all right** because it may not be

*   they are **lucky it wasn't worse** as such statements rarely console anyone who is traumatised

*   about death using abstract explanations or euphemisms, **gone to sleep, passed away**

*   how they are feeling.

Short-term tasks—informing parents and the school community

Parents, school councillors, other members of the school community and neighboring schools will want to know what has happened and to assist if possible. It is important that they are given factual information and that the information has been approved for public release.

*   confirm the release of information with those directly affected and to the police

*   send a letter to parents about the incident

*   advise parents about the recovery arrangements which have been put in place

*   provide copies of the *Common reactions to trauma* pamphlets to parents

*   explain to parents that adolescents are likely to seek comfort from their peer group rather than their parents and adults

*   provide a recovery room for parents and run parent briefings as required.

Sample letters to the school community

Sample letters to parents from the principal

Prompt communication with all parents in the school following an emergency will help them to understand what has happened and will also help to dispel rumors which can be extremely destructive. If possible, an information letter should be sent to all parents within twenty-four hours of the emergency. Further information could be communicated to parents as an information item in the school's regular newsletter or as a special newsletter about the emergency.

Information to be included in the letter should be verified for accuracy and confirmed as available for public release with police and Department of Education staff. In some cases, police or others may not want certain information to be published, even though it may be widely circulating informally within the school comunity.

> *Each of the sample letters have five functions.*
>
> *It tells parents:*
>
>   *1. the facts*
>
>   *2. what the school has done*
>
>   *3. the school's plans*
>
>   *4. how their children may react*
>
>   *5. how to get help*

Sample letters to the school community

Sample letter—student death

School letterhead

Date

Dear Parents,

Yesterday two of our students were tragically killed in a road accident while returning from .... XX and XY were in the bus with other Year 11 students when it went out of control on the icy road near .... and rolled down the hill.

Several other students, teachers and the driver were injured, but none sustained serious physical injuries. All were able to go home after medical treatment.
I have visited the parents of XX and XY and offered them the condolences of our whole community together with any support we are able to give.

We intend to hold a memorial service for XX and XY on Wednesday afternoon at our school. Further details will follow.

Although your sons and daughters may be affected by the death of our students, it would be best for school routine to continue as normally as possible, and students should continue to 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 and eating problems. Should you or your child feel the need for professional help or counselling, please contact myself or the student welfare coordinator ...., who will be able to assist you.

A counsellor from .... has spoken to the Year ..... students today and will be available for you to contact if you wish. Contact may be made through the student welfare coordinator, or on .... (telephone/pager number).

Principal

Sample letter—student death

Phoenix Secondary College
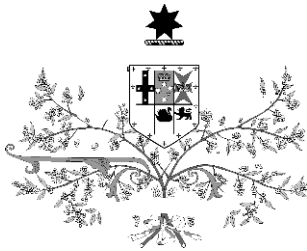
ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO

THE PRINCIPAL

PO BOX 283

PHOENIXVILLE

4 July

Dear Parents

Early on Sunday morning three current students and a former student were tragically killed and one was critically injured.

We have spoken with the parents and offered them the heartfelt sympathy of our whole school community as well as any support or help we are able to give.

We have been reassured by the care and concern demonstrated by students, teachers and parents in the support offered at this difficult time. Also, we have in place at school a support system which involves psychologists and social workers from the Department of Education. This system will be in place for some time.

Your children may be affected by the students deaths in many ways. Reactions may include crying, not wanting to talk, wanting to talk, anger, wanting to be alone, lack of concentration, sleeping or eating problems. Should you or your child feel the need for professional counselling please contact me or _____, our school psychologist/social worker on telephone _____ who will be able to advise on procedures.

It would be best for school procedures to continue as normally as possible when students return to school and for students to attend each day. There is no doubt that we have all been saddened by this event. We feel sure you will offer your children every support.

_____

College Spokesperson

Sample letter—student death

Mountain View Primary School
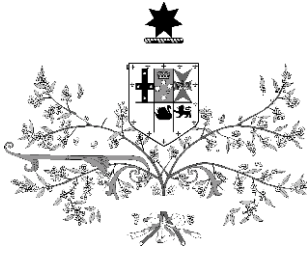
ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO

THE PRINCIPAL

MOUNTAIN VIEW PRIMARY SCHOOL

PO BOX 2943

PHOENIXVILLE

18 July

Dear Parents

Last week one of our students was killed in tragic circumstances. Details have not been released but charges have been laid and a court case is pending. The school has made a floral tribute to _____ 's family and offered them the sympathy of our school community and the Year 5 children will establish a memorial.

We have been reassured by the care and concern demonstrated by students, teachers and parents in the support offered at this difficult time. Also, we have in place at school a support system which involves psychologists and social workers from the Department of Education.

Your child may be affected by _____ 's death in many different ways. Reactions may include not wanting to go to school, crying, not wanting to be alone and lack of concentration.

Should your child need counselling, please contact me and I will make the necessary arrangements.

It would be best for school routine to continue as normally as possible and for students to attend each day. There is no doubt we have all been saddened by this event.

Every effort is being made to support the children at school and I feel sure you will be doing the same at home.

_____

Principal

Sample letter—student death

Sample letter—death of a teacher

Phoenix Primary School
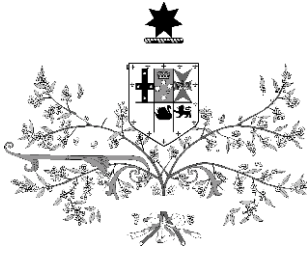
ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO

THE PRINCIPAL

PRIMARY SCHOOL NUMBER 9753

PO BOX 283

PHOENIXVILLE

20 October

Dear Parents

Today we had some very bad news about one of our teachers. As some of you will know Ms _____ has not been well and tragically she died yesterday.

Your children will be very upset and in particular Ms _____'s class. We have talked with all the children and we have had trained counsellors at the school today. If your child is very upset and needs further counselling or if you would like to speak with the counsellors yourself about this matter, they will be available tomorrow at school.

Although your children will be affected by the loss of their teacher, it would be best for school routine to continue as normally as possible and children should attend school. Reactions of children will vary and may include crying, not wanting to talk, wanting to talk, anger, wanting to be alone, lack of concentration, sleeping or eating problems.

If there is anyway we can help you or your children deal with this sadness, please contact me on telephone _____, and assistance can be arranged. Please feel free to talk with me at any time.

_____

Acting Principal

Sample letter—regular newsletter

CORNWALL PRIMARY SCHOOL
PO BOX 4938
CORNWALL

NEWSLETTER
NO. 15

PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE

Dear Parents,

We were all very saddened and shocked at the news yesterday of the fatal accident at Phoenix Railway Crossing in which two young children, a brother and sister were killed. The children were known to some of our students as they played in local sporting clubs.

It brings back vividly many painful memories of the loss within our own school community some eighteen months ago. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to the families and friends of the children concerned.

I have contacted the principals of _____ Primary and _____ Secondary College expressing our sympathy and offering our support for them at this sad time.

Working bee

The working bee held on Sunday was a great success. Thirty-two parents attended and cleaned, swept and painted. Thank you to all those hard working parents.

School concert

The end of the year school concert will be held on Thursday night (22nd December) at 7.00 pm. We hope all parents will be able to come and appreciate the hard work their children and teachers have put into preparing the Christmas pageant.

MS Readathon

Ms Crossley's Year 2 class participated in the MS Readathon this year and raised $90.00 for research. Well done 2C!

Sample letter—regular newsletter

Sample letter—anticipated death

Central Primary School

ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO

THE PRINCIPAL

PRIMARY SCHOOL NUMBER 9753

PO BOX 283

PHOENIXVILLE

22 August

Dear Parents

As some of you will know _____ has not been well for some time and she died yesterday. _____ has been a wonderful support to our school. Many of you will know her from her times on canteen duty and the work she did in Ms Timms' class taking reading each Wednesday morning.

We offer our heartfelt sympathy to her two children, John in Prep 1 and Michaela in Year 4B, and her husband, Bob. The school will be represented at the funeral by Ms Timms and myself. A floral tribute has also been sent.

Your children may be upset, and in particular, Ms Timms' class. We have talked with all the children and have had some trained counsellors at the school today. Reactions of children will vary and may include crying, asking questions about death and fear that their own parents may die. If your child is very upset and needs further counselling, or if you would like to speak with the counsellors yourself about this matter, they will be available tomorrow at school.

If there is anyway we can help you or your children deal with this sadness, please contact me on telephone _____, and assistance can be arranged. Please feel free to talk with me at anytime.

Families who wish to assist Bob and the children by taking part in the Parents and Friends casserole drive can contact _____ on _____.

_____

Principal

Medium-term recovery

Medium-term recovery management requires school personnel charged with the responsibility of managing emergencies to restore school routine. At the same time, provision should be made for the ongoing support of members of the school community.

It is at this time that funerals and associated rituals take place and when people are often most emotionally vulnerable, yet wanting to return to normal.

Parents are likely to discuss reactions their children are experiencing such as physical and emotional tiredness and degrees of sleep disturbance. Parents may need an opportunity to discuss their own tiredness and the need to protect their children after a life threatening event. Children may indicate a desire for the return of routine and normality. Most children grieve intermittently rather than continuously. There may be times when children seem to have forgotten the death or the emergency. Flashbacks can be triggered for months and years.

Medium-term tasks—during the first week

- provide information and encourage support networks among parents

- restore regular school routine

- allow opportunities to talk about the incident and reactions

- monitor and support reactions within the school community

- reiterate information about reactions as required

- use specialist support staff to assist staff, students and parents

- provide information updates about the condition of anyone in hospital

- prepare public expressions of farewell such as obituaries and wreaths when a death has occurred

- be aware of cultural and religious differences in response to death and what the funeral may entail

- keep parents informed, parents may wish to meet together

- monitor those in care giving roles

- consider referring students with persistent behavior changes to a counsellor or specialist agency

- liaise with community support agencies such as churches, funeral directors, community health centres, police in schools units

- liaise with neighboring schools

- keep a scrapbook of eulogies and sympathy cards in a central location for members of the school community to read

- monitor media coverage of the event to identify areas which may be causing difficulty or distress for students and staff

- refer staff who are concerned with issues of legal liability to professional associations and Department of Education legal officers

- suggest that staff make detailed notes for their personal reference about the event and their part in it

- suggest that staff obtain copies of any official statements they make

- use replacement class room teachers to enable staff to attend the funeral.

Practical ideas for the classroom

Children and adolescents need to give concrete expression to their trauma and grief. The following activities may be useful in helping children come to terms with the event:

- answer children's questions simply and directly. If the questions are too hard or seem inappropriate or it is distressing to answer them, ask the child to suggest an answer. This can help both teacher and child start to discuss the feeling behind the question being asked

- talk with students about what made that person special

- make cards or drawings expressing how sad they feel and maybe include a special memory of that person

- create a memory box where students can write a memory of that person and store them in the box

- write goodbye letters

- make an audiotape using a starter such as *What I'd like to say to ..., Was special because ...*

- compile a collection of edited student drawings about their classmate and present it to the child's parents

- collect photographs of the child at the school and present them to the child's parents, eg class, excursion, concert, sporting photos

- provide a special place within the school where students and staff can place memorials and tributes

- set up an aquarium in the classroom with tadpoles to discuss life cycles

- use story books and novels to discuss life events

- make up a story book about the child

- allocate a sports trophy or award in the name of the deceased

Practical ideas for the classroom

Practical ideas for the classroom

- organise a tribute or commemorative activity such as planting a special plant or laying a plaque

- prepare the rest of the class for the return of students affected by the emergency

- use journal writings as a way of monitoring a student's responses

- collect and donate money to specific charities or illness foundations when a student has died from a terminal illness

- discuss the cause of the event as a lead into prevention and preparedness issues

- mobilise support from friends, let them discuss how they can support their friend

- engage in accident prevention activities

- use student's desk as a focal point for memorials, tributes and good byes

- use photos for memorial activities, particularly with intellectual impaired students

- make a colouring book about the event

- consider grief and loss education programs provided by grief associations or funeral homes

- write personal biographies as a class activity with chapter headings which could include: *My Parents, Grandparents, Brothers and Sisters, Family Tree, Family Gatherings, Birthdays and Weddings*

- make use of personal safety **feelings posters** to discuss the range of emotions or make your own feelings posters in class

- use **strength cards** to compile a list of the special things about the student.

Resources for teachers

Primary fiction

Aliki	**Feelings**
Buchanan Smith, D	**A Taste of Blackberries**
Croser, J	**Tiddycat**
Curtis Stilz, C	**Kirsty's Kite**
Denton, T	**Felix and Alexander**
Denton, T	**School for Laughter**
Fleck Cardy, A	**Dusty Was My Friend**
Fox, M	**Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge**
Hamston, J	**Sam's Grandpa**
Hunt, N and Kubbos, A	**The Dove Tree**
Meltonie, B and Ingpen, R	**Beginnings, Endings with Lifetimes in Between**
Miles, S	**Alfi and the Dark**
Taylor, K	**Dear Nanna**
Townsend, M and Stern, R	**Pop's Secret**
Viorst, Z	**The Tenth Good Thing about Barney**
Wagner, J	**John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat**
Willis, J	**The Monster Bed**
Zolotow, C	**My Grandson Lew**

Upper primary/secondary fiction

Bennet-Blackburn, L	**The Class in Room 44**
Blume, J	**Tiger Eyes**
Branfield, J	**The Fox in Winter**
Craven, M	**I Heard an Owl Call My Name**
Day, D	**Are You Listening Karen**
Gleitzman, M	**Two Weeks with the Queen**
Lowry, L	**A Summer to Die**
Love, L	**So Much to Tell You**
Paterson, K	**Bridge to Terabithia**
Voigt, C	**Tell Me if Lovers Are Losers**
White, EB	**Charlotte's Web**
Zindel, B and P	**A Star for the Latecomer**

Funeral arrangements and rituals

Rituals serve an important function for both adults and children. These rituals assist in:

*   reducing unreality

*   counteracting fantasies

*   getting some understanding of what is happening

*   helping individuals to work through the event

*   saying goodbye

*   establishing a shared understanding of the event.

Viewing the body

In some cultures, viewing the body is seen as an important part of the ritual. Students can be helped through this process by an adult who is able to describe what they will see when they enter the room. An adult who enters the room first to see the dead person is then able to describe the room to those students who wish to view the body. The description can also include the casket and how the appearance of the dead person may have changed, eg visually and in terms of touch and temperature change. It is equally important for adults to be prepared for this experience.

Attending the funeral

It is generally beneficial for children to attend the funeral, although they should not be forced to attend against their wishes. Before the funeral the child should be given a detailed description of:

*   what will happen

*   what the room will look like

*   what the casket will look like

*   information about the service

Funeral arrangements and rituals

- what the burial will entail

- possible adult reactions during the rituals

- how they might feel themselves.

It may be helpful to invite the minister or priest conducting the service to be available to answer students' questions and to describe the planned ceremony.

Some families are willing to allow classmates to assist in planning the rituals. They may be able to participate in the ceremony by reading eulogies choosing music, or by placing a flower on the casket.

It is also important for adults to be prepared for the funeral ceremony. There are a range of cultural and religious differences in response to death and it is essential that members of the school community who are attending the funeral are briefed beforehand on what will happen during the ceremony and burial. Funeral agencies may assist with further information and support.

There are also some practical needs to consider when large numbers of students are attending a funeral:

- to minimise fainting or hyperventilation encourage students to remove coats or jumpers prior to the ceremony

- have a first-aid trained person to assist distressed students

- have cold drinks and cool face washers available

- prepare for a media presence at the funeral

- get students and staff to return to school for coffee and sandwiches after the funeral to allow monitoring of reactions and support

- organise a time for students not attending the funeral to bring their memorials and floral tributes to a nominated room at school and for someone to take them to the funeral of their behalf.

Long-term recovery

Long-term recovery management requires a continuing awareness of individual needs and reactions and a process for managing those responses.

It is also useful at this time to re-examine the school's emergency management plan, to revise the plan on the basis of what worked well and what didn't work. Strategies which were found to be useful during the emergency should be included in the plan for future use.

Long-term tasks

• monitor and support members of the school community, particularly on significant dates such as anniversaries

• consider long term intervention activities such as the need for on going counselling or other specialist support

• reconvene key people at regular intervals to review the school's response and the effectiveness of planning arrangements

• revise the school emergency management plan in light of experience gained

• continue liaison with outside agencies and maintain contact networks

• consider a ritual of marking significant dates

• prepare for legal proceedings, if necessary.

Long-term recovery

Long-term issues

Recovery can take up to three years or even longer. Significant dates or events such as anniversaries, or the taking of annual school photos may bring about reemergence of symptoms. Six months after the initial incident is a critical time.

The affected group may feel forgotten as time passes by and relationship problems may emerge. Those who were drawn together by a shared experience are likely to start pulling away from each other and establishing new networks. Family cohesion may be altered as different members grieve and respond differently.

Grief, longing and pain may be particularly strong or may return on anniversary dates such as birthdays, the date that the incident occurred, or other significant dates such as Christmas. Marking these days may be helpful in giving concrete expression to such feelings.

Individuals may continue responding to triggers that remind them of the event for a long time. Hot, windy days often unsettle people who have experienced bushfires for many years after the experience.

Media may continue to use footage of an event for years, especially when a similar event occurs. This may be distressing and unsettling for some people. Reactions may appear weeks or months later and could be triggered by another loss.

Children will grieve more intermittently and over a longer period of time than an adult. The intensity of the emotions cannot be sustained for very long, so children will let the grief go, allowing it to return in small spurts.

Long-term issues

Long-term tasks

- consider the significance of anniversaries and plan commemorative activities if appropriate

- monitor students for signs of change including relationship problems, drug dependency, hyper arousal, increased susceptibility to illness and accidents

- prepare people for coronial inquests and legal proceedings providing them with knowledge about what to expect

- review the curriculum and include or enhance life skills programs and bereavement education where appropriate

- acknowledge the work of school-based and specialist care givers and continue to monitor their wellbeing, particularly when things start to quieten down and they may start to reveal their own views about the experience

- inform any new teacher about the child's or the class's experience and possible triggers which may cause a re-emergence of symptoms

- alert regular specialist support staff about any concerns regarding students or other members of the school community.

Long-term tasks

Court appearance

Students and staff should be adequately prepared for appearance in court. Students may be prepared by involving them in:

- role plays
- discussion of the nature of the criminal or coronial court process
- visits to court prior to appearance
- meeting the clerk of the court
- standing in the witness box
- warning of likely distressing points in the hearing
- discussion of possible media coverage and limitations imposed by the court
- previewing evidence including video footage.

It is recommended that on the day of the hearing anyone attending court:

- eat breakfast
- bring a cut lunch to avoid having to leave the court complex or being confronted by the media
- try and ignore the media
- refer all media requests to a nominated media spokesperson
- ensure that support is available to members of the school community as information and findings are released during the court process.
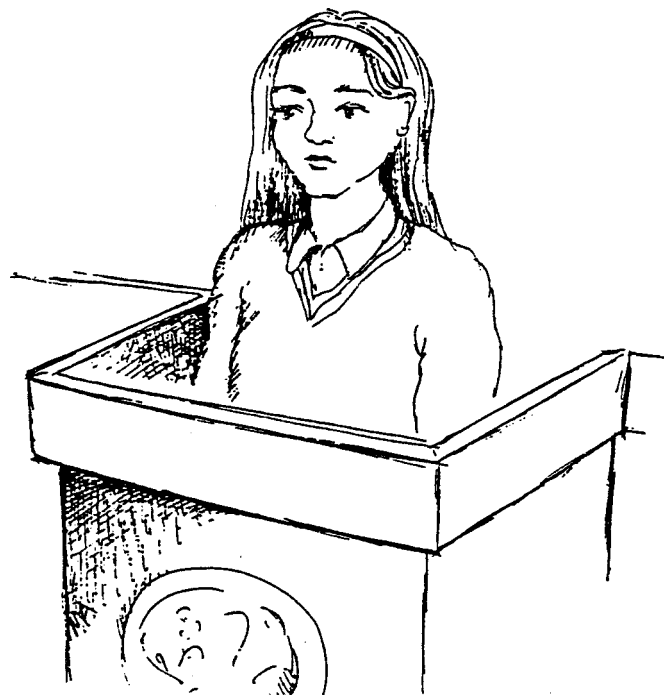
The court process

The Victorian Court Network is a voluntary service, which provides support and advice to people required to attend courts in Victoria. The Court Network can be contacted by telephone on (03) 9670 6977. Staff can assist in preparing individuals in the school community for their court appearance.
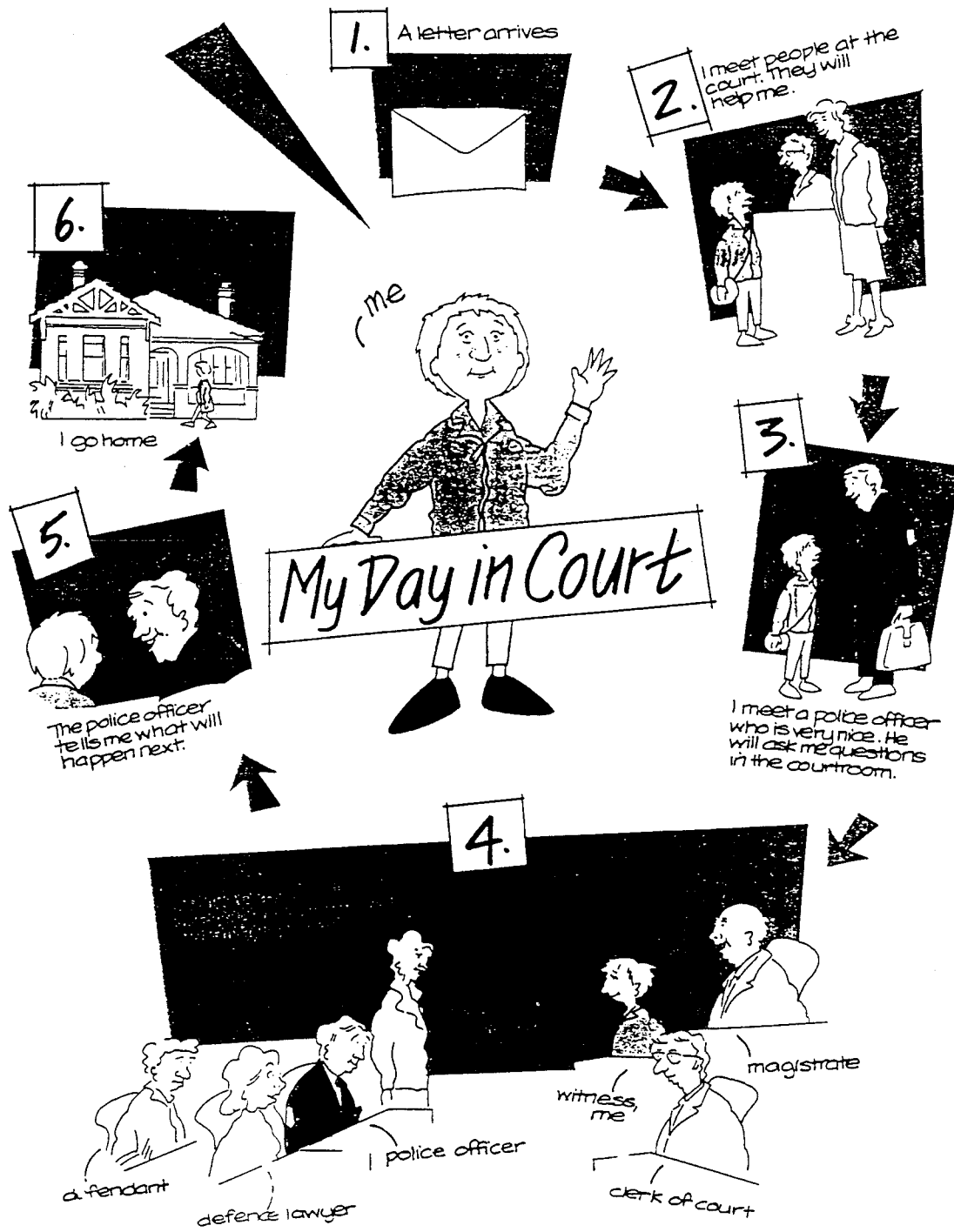
Managing the media

School personnel need to be aware that any incident which combines injury with children is likely to interest the media. Electronic and print media will take every opportunity to fulfil their legitimate role in providing public information. In many cases, media will be at an emergency affecting a school group before personnel at the school know there is an emergency. Sensationalising events can have adverse effects on the recovery process and may in fact create trauma for some people.

News crews and journalists may be expected to use any means at their disposal to obtain a story if school personnel refuse to talk to them. Schools need to actively control the media, coordinate media requests for information, issue media releases, schedule press conferences and nominate someone to take part in interviews. In return for providing scheduled taped and on camera interviews, the media will normally respond favorably to school requests to refrain from uninvited interviews of students or parents in the school grounds. Schools can often use the media productively to assist recovery efforts when the initial emergency is over.

In many cases, the police will assume responsibility for media liaison. Before school personnel agree to providing interviews, it is important to check whether it is appropriate and what information can be discussed publicly. In general, school personnel should restrict comment to the emergency itself, the reaction of the school community and the support mechanisms in place to assist staff and students. Department of Education policy should not be discussed.

Prepare a media release containing about three paragraphs that has been verified for accuracy and checked with police and family

- paragraph 1   **briefly outlines the verified facts**
- paragraph 2   **outline what the school has done to assist those affected**
- paragraph 3   **outline support and recovery arrangements**
- include a name and contact number for the school media coordinator
- fax the release to chiefs of staff of major media outlets

Coordinating media coverage

- nominate someone to coordinate all media enquiries

- instruct staff to refer media requests to the school's media coordinator

- nominate someone with media presence who can provide on camera interviews such as the principal or council president

- confirm with police media liaison or Department of Education staff whether the school is authorised to provide media comment

- liaise with the family about any statements made to the media

- establish rules for interviews which exclude discussion of policy matters and limit comment to the emergency and the school response

- brief staff, students and parents, if possible, about probable media coverage

- set rules for dealing with persistent media

- fax an initial media release to chiefs of staff of major media organisations

- obtain a media contact list from the Emergency and Security Management Branch

- issue regular media releases containing updated information

- keep a record of media enquiries

- offer scheduled interviews and press conferences in return for media commitment not to seek uninvited access to staff, students or parents

- provide media with story ideas which minimise distress to the school emphasising positive recovery activity being undertaken such as the use of trauma counsellors

- negotiate accepted areas for filming such as the school boundary, outside of church at funerals but not within

- check that information provided to the media does not conflict with court requirements or police investigations

- keep a scrap book of newspaper clippings and videos of media coverage

- anticipate renewed media interest arising from anniversaries, similar events, court cases.

Coordinating media coverage

Sample media release

JOSEPHINE PARK SECONDARY COLLEGE

ALL CORRESPONDENCE
TO THE PRINCIPAL

MEDIA RELEASE

THREE STUDENTS AND A FORMER STUDENT FROM JOSEPHINE PARK SECONDARY COLLEGE DIED AND ONE WAS CRITICALLY INJURED WHEN THE CAR THEY WERE TRAVELLING IN CRASHED ON THE DILLAN HIGHWAY AT FEATHERSTONE IN THE EARLY HOURS OF SUNDAY MORNING.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION COUNSELLORS HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH SCHOOL STAFF TO IDENTIFY THOSE WHO MAY HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY THIS TRAUMATIC EVENT.

DEPARTMENT PSYCHOLOGISTS AND SOCIAL WORKERS WILL CONTINUE TO WORK WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY TO DEVELOP A RECOVERY PLAN FOR THE SCHOOL TO SUPPORT THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY.

ANY MEDIA ENQUIRIES TO THE SCHOOL SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO WENDY SMITH ON 9434 3434.

Coping with suicide

Helping students cope after a suicide

Suicide, like other forms of sudden death and trauma affects the whole school community. Managing recovery after a suicide is especially difficult as it is often surrounded by taboos, myths and secrecy.

The secrecy that often surrounds suicide develops a climate in which it is difficult for students to gain assistance with their own reactions and depression. School that manage the event successfully are likely to be less at risk of copy cat suicides or related risk taking behaviours.

It is important for teachers to monitor students who may be at high risk following a suicide, particularly those who show extreme reactions, are particularly close to the deceased or who have had previous traumas in their lives. Students may express feelings of guilt or responsibility for the death. It is valuable to emphasise that suicide was the choice of the person.

Coping with suicide

Coping with suicide
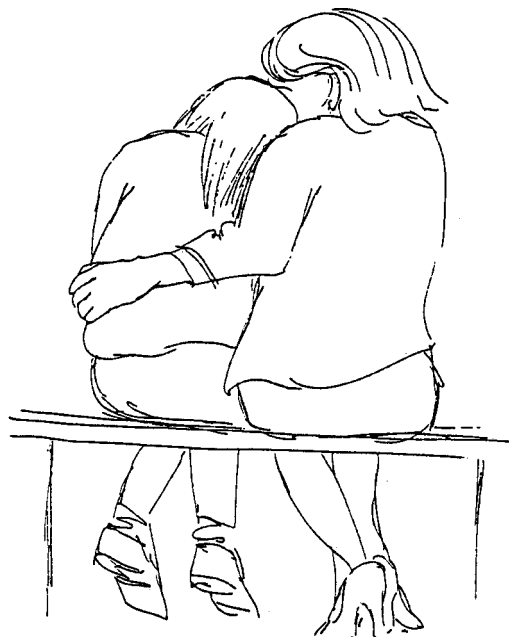
Short-term tasks

- where possible, check with parents to determine what information can be released

- inform staff about the death and discuss ways of dealing with students

- inform students about the death in an honest and sensitive manner

- be aware of affected brothers and sisters, close friends, girlfriends or boyfriends

- provide unambiguous information to staff and students which will dispel rumours

- avoid providing excessive detail about the method used to bring about the death, the motivation, family reaction

- do not glorify or romanticise the death or encourage others to do so

- try to dispel any myths that students may express about the death ... *he must have been brave to kill himself*

- encourage discussion which emphasises that the person chose to commit suicide

- discourage students from apportioning or accepting blame

- use active listening skills to support students who want to talk about the death

- wait for students to raise issues rather than forcing discussion when they may not be ready to do so

- provide students with information about grief reactions and the grieving process

- emphasise that grief reactions are normal and that they will disappear over time

- reassure students that there is no right way to feel or react in these circumstances

- encourage students to talk to their parents about the suicide

- provide information to students and parents about support services which are available through the school and the community

- identify a recovery room where students can go if they need a quiet area

- monitor students to identify those who may need support—particularly those who show extreme reactions, are close to the dead person or are known to have had traumatic experiences of their own

- monitor anyone who seems particularly withdrawn and be aware of the potential for copycat behaviour.

Medium-term tasks

- continue to monitor those students who are most affected or at highest risk

- encourage students to use networks of friends

- discuss with students how they might support one another

- provide staff with information about warning signs and risk factors

- ensure that provision is made for staff to deal with their own grief

- prepare staff and students for the funeral.

Long-term tasks

- continue to monitor the school community over the long-term

- be aware of the significance and sensitivity which surrounds anniversaries, sporting events, school photos

- review the school's response to death and suicide and accommodate changes to the curriculum and personal development policies where appropriate.

Coping with suicide

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Wells, R., *Helping Children Cope with Grief*, Sheldon Press, London

Whitla, M., (1994) *Coping with Crises in Schools. Preparation, Response and Recovery*, Collins Dove, Australia

References are available from the following sources:

Nelson Brothers Funeral Services Pty Ltd
Bereavement Resource Centre
229 Park Street
South Melbourne Vic 3205
(03) 9696 0244

Open Leaves Bookshop
71 Cardigan Street
Carlton Vic 3053
(03) 9347 2355

References

Department of Education emergency management plan

GLOSSARY

1. PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS

1.1 What's in the plan

1.2 Emergency management in context

2. VICTORIA'S EMERGENCY ARRANGEMENTS

2.1 Coordination of planning arrangements

3. RESPONSE

3.1 Coordination and control during an emergency

3.2 Roles and responsibilities

Department of Education emergency management plan

GLOSSARY

Combat agency
Any emergency service which has legal responsibility for responding to an emergency of a particular type, eg the fire brigade is responsible for fighting fires. The Department of Education is a support agency and has no legal authority to combat emergencies.

Control
The overall direction of emergency management activities. Authority for control is established in legislation or in plans and empowers nominated officers to direct Department of Education employees, to open, enter or close premises and to requisition equipment or other resources as required.

Coordination
The systematic acquisition and application of resources including personnel and equipment in accordance with arrangements described in plans to meet the requirements of an emergency.

Coordination centre
An office or other private area with access to telephone, radio and facsimile equipment established during an emergency to coordinate response and recovery activity.

Critical incident debriefing/defusing
A critical incident is one which by its nature has the potential to leave lasting affects on those involved including personnel providing counselling or support services to others. The debriefing/ defusing process led by an experienced counsellor immediately following an emergency to assist those affected to understand what has happened to them and to cope more effectively.

Department
Reference to the Department throughout this document refers to the Department of Education. Any reference to titles or positions refers to Department of Education personnel unless otherwise specified. In particular, the title regional emergency management coordinator refers to a Department position and should not be confused with the police regional coordinator under the State emergency response plan.

Displan—State emergency response plan
The term **Displan** is no longer in use. It refers to the State emergency response plan which contains arrangements to facilitate the coordinated response to emergencies by government and non-government agencies.

Emergency
Defined in emergency management legislation as any actual or imminent event which in any way endangers or threatens to endanger the safety or health of any person in Victoria or which destroys or damages, or threatens to destroy or damage any property in Victoria or endangers or threatens to endanger the environment or an element of the environment in Victoria.

Emergency and Security Management Branch
Branch in the Department of Education responsible for statewide planning for prevention of emergencies, and the coordination of response and recovery activity related to emergencies.

Emergency coordinator
Department of Education officer responsible for decision-making at state, regional or local level during an emergency. At the school level, the coordinator would normally be the principal, assistant principal or senior staff member.

Emergency information/reception centre
An office or other private area which may be used by concerned friends or relatives, or the emergency services to provide information or for operational purposes.

Emergency management
Process involving planning, prevention, response and recovery by which schools and workplaces prepare themselves for, and respond to, emergencies.

Emergency Management Act 1986
Victoria's legislative framework for the coordinated management of prevention, response and recovery from emergencies at state, regional and local levels.

Emergency management officer
Department of Education officer at state or regional level responsible for planning and responding to emergencies under direction from the state or regional coordinator.

Emergency management plan
A plan at state, regional or local level which addresses prevention, response and recovery needs and arrangements for responding to emergencies.

Liaison officer
Nominated officer responsible for on site liaison with the emergency services and those affected.

Municipal emergency management plan
Local government plan which provides for the prevention of, response to, and recovery from emergencies. Municipal plans list resources which can be provided to combat and support agencies.

Preparedness
Management arrangements which ensure the readiness of personnel and familiarity with their responsibilities under emergency management plans during emergencies.

Prevention
Part of the emergency pre-planning process which involves assessing potential or actual risks and the development of a program of activities to eliminate or minimise them.

Recovery
Process by which affected individuals or groups are returned to a proper level of functioning following an emergency.

Recovery plan
A plan at state, regional or local level which identifies the means by which individuals and groups affected by emergencies will be returned to a proper level of functioning. A recovery plan would normally be part of a comprehensive school emergency management plan.

Regional coordinator—emergency management
Department of Education officer responsible for decision-making at regional level during an emergency, normally an assistant general manager in one of the Department's regions.

Response
The initial component of an emergency which requires action by the combating authorities—police, ambulance, fire brigade to ensure the ongoing safety of people and property.

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State coordinator—emergency management
The state coordinator controls the response to any emergency which affects schools or workplaces affecting more than one region, which is confined to one region but is beyond the region's resources, or which is deemed by the state coordinator to require statewide coordination. The state coordinator is authorised by the Minister to take whatever action is deemed to be appropriate to resolve an emergency, including the direction of personnel and the appropriation of resources including school premises. The statewide coordinator is the manager of the Emergency and Security Management Branch.

State emergency recovery plan
The Victorian Government's plan for providing financial and specialist support services to individuals and communities affected by emergencies. The Victorian Department of Human Services coordinates recovery activity at state and regional levels during major emergencies.

State Education Emergency Management Committee
Committee responsible for the provision of statewide policy and emergency management planning advice. Representatives include regions, district personnel, principals and teacher organisations, police, fire brigade, Red Cross, State Emergency Service, non-government schools.

State education emergency management plan
The Department of Education's statewide plan which describes actions to be taken at state level to minimise the effect of emergencies on schools and workplaces.

Support agency
Government and non-government agencies involved in providing support and assistance to the combating authorities during response to an emergency. Support agencies continue to play a major role in recovery activity following the release of the combating agencies.

Workplace
Any Department of Education school or non-school premises, including regional office, central office, camp or other location when not otherwise identified.

PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS 1

What's in the plan 1.1

The State education emergency management plan describes the broad environment within which Government schools and workplaces function in the State of Victoria, the potential risks to which they may be exposed from time to time and the manner in which the response to emergencies and the provision of support to school communities will be coordinated at state level.

The aim 1.1.1

The plan provides a statewide emergency management framework within which the central administration, regions, schools and non- school workplaces can develop and implement their own emergency management arrangements which address prevention, preparedness, response and recovery needs.

The aim of this plan is to ensure that when an emergency occurs affecting a school or other workplace, an immediate and coordinated response occurs within the Department which leads to a prompt resolution of the emergency and the provision of recovery support to minimise the immediate and long-term impact of the event on those involved.

The objective of emergency management planning is to minimise exposure to potential risks and to ensure coordination of response and support at state, regional and local levels when an emergency occurs.

Scope 1.1.2

The education emergency management plan is primarily concerned with the responsibilities of personnel during emergencies requiring state level coordination. State level coordination may be required during emergencies if local or regional resources are inadequate, or if the emergency extends across regional boundaries. The plan is designed to complement emergency management plans developed by the central office, regions, schools and non-school workplaces.

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Implementation of the arrangements described in the plan is not intended to conflict with the legal obligations of schools and other workplaces such as those imposed under occupational health and safety legislation and normal duty of care responsibilities imposed on teachers. Implementation of the plan does not absolve schools, workplaces or individuals from complying with existing legal obligations.

Planning principles   1.1.3

Planning for emergency management is concerned with the design and establishment of arrangements for implementation during an emergency. Management is the process by which the delivery of response and recovery services is supervised. Key elements in the management process include coordination, control and communication.

Prevention is identified as a key principle in the development, implementation and review of the plan. A proactive approach which relies on effective preventive measures will reduce the likelihood of emergencies occurring and will reduce the impact of those emergencies which do occur. At state level, prevention strategies focus on the development of policies, guidelines and advice which ensure that workplace activities are conducted in safety.

The immediate provision of support to assist workplaces involved in emergencies will lead to earlier resolution of the emergency and will minimise the impact on those involved both in the short- and the long-term. Any delay in providing support will reduce the effectiveness of coordination directed towards resolving the emergency and increase the likelihood of individuals being permanently affected.

Department guidance officers, social workers and psychologists contracted to provide trauma services to the Department, would normally form a core group providing a needs assessment for the delivery of recovery programs to affected workplaces. Service delivery teams would be derived from the same personnel. A workplace which is involved in an emergency may require support for an extended period to facilitate return to an acceptable level of functioning. An emergency may have effects on those involved lasting months or even years after the initial crisis has been resolved.

Recovery from emergencies is best achieved when those affected are involved in processes which empower them to make decisions about their own recovery. Support

must be timely, fair, equitable and recognise school community needs and desires. Recovery arrangements need to be comprehensive and integrated bringing together key Department personnel and other agencies with recovery responsibilities.

The plan will only be effective if personnel responsible for its implementation are aware of its contents and adhere to its procedures during an emergency. Staff with emergency management responsibilities need to be involved in regular training at state, regional and local levels to ensure effective implementation of the plan when confronted by an emergency.

For the plan to remain effective, its contents need to reflect current theory and practice. Regular review will ensure that the plan remains current. The plan is to be reviewed biennially by the State Education Emergency Management Committee. In the event of an emergency occurring which requires state level coordination, the plan is to be reviewed as soon as possible after the event to determine whether procedures described in the plan were followed and whether they were adequate.

The statewide plan is not a substitute for effective planning at the regional, school or non-school workplace level, but should complement plans developed at those levels. It assumes that workplace activities are planned and conducted in accordance with relevant policies, guidelines and procedures, that actual and potential risks are identified and assessed, and that specific procedures are developed at central office, regional, and local level for implementation during an emergency.

Workplace planning for emergencies should incorporate guidelines contained in Department publications, including the *Schools of the Future Reference Guide* and those related to outdoor adventure activities and occupational health and safety.

It is important that a balance be achieved between the educational value of any activity and the degree of risk it entails. Many of the developmental skills which education promotes entail a degree of risk taking. The element of risk cannot be removed entirely from school activities. Any attempt to eliminate risks entirely from school activities would prevent students from participating in a range of activities including camps, excursions and outdoor adventure activities—activities which provide positive educational experiences. The plan recognises that there may be inherent risks in some activities and that there is a need to prepare for emergencies arising from them.

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Emergency management in context 1.2

The Victorian Government school system 1.2.1

The Department of Education employs approximately 40,000 teaching, non-teaching and public service staff, and is responsible for more than 500,000 students and the operation of some 1,800 workplaces throughout Victoria.

The majority of Government workplaces are concentrated in the greater metropolitan areas surrounding Melbourne and the Mornington Peninsula and in the provincial centres of Geelong and Ballarat. Many country workplaces are located in remote or isolated areas. Some of these workplaces have small student enrolments and a staff comprising one or two teachers. Contract buses are used extensively throughout the state to transport students to and from school.

The Minister for Education, Secretary, Deputy Secretaries, senior managers and policy officers are centrally located in Melbourne. The state is divided into nine education regions:

Barwon–South Western Region
Central Highlands–Wimmera Region
Eastern Metropolitan Region
Gippsland Region
Goulburn–North Eastern Region
Loddon Campaspe–Mallee Region
Northern Metropolitan Region
Southern Metropolitan Region
Western Metropolitan Region.

Each region is responsible for supporting the day-to-day administration of schools. A range of student services including welfare is provided through specialist support staff located in each region. Specialist school support staff are responsible to regional management. Regional management has a responsibility to ensure that workplaces within the region undertake adequate emergency management planning.

Duty of care 1.2.2

The Department is obliged to plan for the safety of those attending its workplaces. Students between prescribed ages are compelled to attend school for defined periods during the day. As a consequence of this legal obligation, the Department has a duty of care to ensure that all school-related activity is conducted in safety. In the emergency management context, the duty of care requires that preplanning be undertaken for emergencies which might affect workplaces from time to time.

The duty of care imposed on all levels of the school community requires that reasonable steps be taken to ensure that the safety of those involved in school-related activities is maintained at all times, even during an emergency.

Environmental considerations 1.2.3

Much of western Victoria comprises flat, open plains and grassland. Major features in the west include the Grampians, coastal mountain ranges in the south-west and desert parks in the north-west. The western plains merge with the Great Dividing Range at the central Victorian highlands and culminate in alpine mountain ranges which traverse the state's north-east. Much of the Great Dividing Range which extends through eastern Victoria is remote and vehicle access is difficult. Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley in the south-east are located between the alpine areas of the Great Dividing Range and the Southern Ocean.

Victoria's national parks, forests and waterways are used regularly throughout the year for school activities. Popular venues include Port Phillip Bay, Lake Eildon, the Gippsland Lakes, Lake Eppalock, the Grampians, alpine areas, Lerderderg Gorge, major mountain ranges and coastal areas.

In winter, alpine and sub-alpine areas in the north-east of the state are covered by snow. The snowfields at Mt Baw Baw, Mt Buller, Falls Creek, Mt Bogong, Mt Hotham, Lake Mountain and Mt St Gwinear are popular venues for school excursions as are the surrounding sub-alpine areas which experience winter snowfalls. During spring, run-off from melting alpine snow and irregular, heavy rainfall cause flooding in many parts of Victoria.

Between November and April each year, fire restrictions are imposed in many parts of the state by the Country Fire Authority to reduce the wildfire risk in bush and grassland areas. Victoria has a well documented history of major fires since settlement involving significant loss of life and extensive property damage. Excursions and outdoor adventure activities are frequently conducted at locations which are at risk from fire in summer and are under snow in winter.

Schools are widely involved in camps, excursions and outdoor adventure activities. The Department owns and operates school camps. Many schools own camps, some of which occupy former school sites, while others use a variety of commercially owned camp venues.

Victoria experiences numerous minor earthquakes each year which do not cause structural damage or personal injury. Most parts of the state are not expected to experience a destructive earthquake. The Latrobe Valley and the Lorne to Apollo Bay area are expected to experience an earthquake resulting in minimal structural damage at an interval of between sixty to 200 years.

Most of Victoria's major highways radiate from Melbourne to provincial centres and to the interstate capitals of Sydney, Canberra and Adelaide. The Hume Highway follows an inland route, while the Princes Highway follows the coastal route to Sydney. Each carries a high volume of passenger and freight traffic. The main Sydney to Melbourne railway line follows the approximate route of the Hume Highway. The Murray Valley Highway follows the Murray River border between New South Wales and Victoria from Mildura in the north-west to Corryong in the north-east. Highway and road coverage is more extensive in the west of the state. The Great Dividing Range extends through a large section of eastern Victoria, much of it accessible only by four wheel drive vehicle.

Commercial transport aircraft and general aviation aircraft regularly use low- and high-altitude flight paths throughout Victoria. Melbourne's international airport is located at Tullamarine and general aviation airports are located at Essendon and Moorabbin. Many provincial centres operate airport facilities and privately owned airstrips are widely dispersed throughout the state. Helicopters are frequently used in both metropolitan and country locations by police, air ambulance and the media.

Potential risks   1.2.4

Victoria is acknowledged as being one of the world's highest risk areas for the outbreak of wildfire. The risk is greatest between November and April each year when restrictions are imposed on the lighting of fires around the state by the Country Fire Authority. On days when extreme weather conditions are forecast, a total ban on the lighting of fires may be imposed. Periods of greatest risk from the outbreak of fire often coincide with the afternoon dismissal times for schools and the transport of students by bus. The potential for accidental fire and arson affecting schools and workplaces exists throughout the year.

Summer weather conditions often follow predictable patterns with temperatures increasing from warm to hot over a period of days, followed by frontal weather which brings cooler temperatures and a west to south-westerly wind change. At the peak of these weather patterns, high temperatures, strong north to north-easterly winds and low humidity combine with dry, highly combustible grassland and forest fuels to produce a high wildfire risk. Frontal weather which causes a change in wind direction while a fire is burning may substantially increase the length of the fire front and increase the potential danger.

Many commercially owned and school owned camp sites are located in areas which are at risk from wildfire during the fire danger period. Many school camps are located in areas which are remote from medical facilities and prompt assistance during an emergency. There is a risk that medical emergencies or injuries which occur at these locations may worsen before medical assistance is provided.

There is a significant risk of school exposure to hazardous materials, including chemicals, which are transported by road and by rail throughout Victoria and which may be involved in fire, spillage or contamination. Many schools, particularly those in the metropolitan area, are in close proximity to commercial or industrial development where hazardous materials are in daily use. Many other schools are located close to the rail and road transport network used for the carriage of hazardous materials.

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Given that most schools are located in metropolitan settings, the potential for involvement in an urban emergency is high. Urban emergencies are most likely to occur beyond the school, but by their nature or size are likely to involve the school or workplace. Police emergencies associated with sieges or raids, industrial emergencies resulting from fire, explosion, building collapse, public transport collision and flash flooding are only some of the possibilities which may lead to a major urban emergency involving schools or workplaces.

Windstorms and minor flooding occur annually in Victoria's river system causing inconvenience and exposing schools to a degree of risk. Major flooding which occurs less frequently, has the potential to cause serious dislocation within communities and disruption to services including schools for days or weeks.

Contract buses are used extensively in both metropolitan and country areas to transport students to school. The transport of students by bus is one of the services which is likely to be disrupted when major flooding occurs. Schools involved in such activities as camping, caving or canoeing at or near river systems during these times are likely to be at risk due to rapidly rising water levels.

Flood and storm warnings provided by the Bureau of Meteorology may enable communities to select alternative routes away from the danger areas. No warning may be available to metropolitan areas which experience flash flooding at regular intervals when stormwater drainage systems fail to cope with heavy rainfall.

Airspace risks may derive from the spread of toxic gases in the atmosphere. They may also derive from regular public transport and general aviation aircraft travelling on flight paths overhead or near schools and workplaces. The risk is increased when aircraft movements in the vicinity of airports are also in close proximity to schools. The risks may be similarly heightened when emergency services and media helicopters use landing sites at or near schools.

While schools are safe and welcoming places for students, the journey to or from school carries some risk for staff and students. There is a significant risk of injury arising from incidents involving motor vehicles including school buses, bicycles, tram and rail transport. The concentration of large numbers of young people in schools, makes the school a focal point for individuals and groups in the community who are motivated to harm children physically or emotionally. Students are vulnerable to approaches by such people while travelling to or from school and are at greatest risk in metropolitan areas.

Domestic tensions resulting from family breakdown and custody disputes may involve the school through the unauthorised removal of a student by a family member. Staff members may also become the focus of aggression by a guardian or relative at such times.

Physical aggression, which may sometimes involve weapons, may also arise when students or staff are threatened by other students or their relatives, former students from the school, or individuals or groups who have no obvious association with the school. Crime against people and property is an ever present risk for school communities.

VICTORIA'S EMERGENCY ARRANGEMENTS 2

The *Emergency Management Act 1986* provides the legislative framework for the coordination of emergency management activity in Victoria. The Act defines what an emergency is in such terms as to include a broad range of events. As a Government agency, the Department has specific response and support obligations under the Act. While the Act provides the legislative framework, Victoria's *Emergency Management Manual* brings together response planning and recovery planning arrangements and outline thes roles and responsibilities of primary and support agencies during an emergency.

Coordination of planning arrangements 2.1

Department's emergency management arrangements 2.1.1

The Department's prevention arrangements provide for:

• Development of the Department's statewide emergency management policy, including guidelines for schools, to prevent or minimise emergencies.

Under the State emergency response plan, the Department's role as it relates to schools includes:

• Provision of an emergency telephone notification and advice service between schools and emergency services through the Department's twenty-four hour communications centre.

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- Provision of on site assistance and support for management of local issues involving parents, staff, students and the media during emergencies.

- Coordination of departmental activity at the school and at the scene of off-site emergencies involving school buses, camps, excursions and outdoor activities, to ensure the safety of students and staff.

Under the State emergency recovery plan, the Department's role includes:

- Provision of specialist support to students, including trauma counselling.

- Provision of specialist services to staff, including trauma counselling.

- Provision of emergency recovery advice and assistance to non-government schools.

Department's emergency management committee   2.1.2

The State Education Emergency Management Committee is responsible for coordinating the development of emergency management policy and advice within the Department. Committee members include:

- Emergency and Security Management Branch
- regional personnel
- specialist support staff
- teacher organisations
- principals organisations
- non-government schools
- emergency services.

The committee's role includes:

- To ensure that planning for emergencies is undertaken by schools.

- To provide a united approach in planning for the response to emergencies at schools, en route to and from school and while under the control of education authorities.

- To plan for the provision of support for combat and support agencies in times of emergencies.

- For Government school children to ensure that planning by all agencies caters for the children legally in the care of the Department of Education.

- For all schools, to ensure that planning for recovery activities takes place to minimise the impact of emergencies on students, teachers and their families.

- To coordinate planning for the ways in which schools may contribute to community recovery activities.

The Department is represented on inter-agency response and recovery planning committees at state and regional levels.

Emergency management regions   2.1.3

The boundaries of the Department's administrative regions are to be used for emergency management planning purposes and when responding to emergencies affecting schools or workplaces at local, regional and state levels.

Defining an emergency   2.1.4

Under Victoria's *Emergency Management Act 1986* **emergency** means an emergency due to the actual or imminent occurrence of an event which in any way endangers or threatens to endanger the safety or health of any person in Victoria or which destroys or threatens to destroy or damage any property in Victoria, or endangers or threatens to endager the environment in Victoria, without limiting the generality of the foregoing:
- an earthquake, flood, windstorm or other natural event
- a fire
- an explosion
- a road accident or any other accident
- a plague or epidemic
- a warlike act, whether directed at Victoria or part of Victoria
- hijack, siege or riot.

In the context of schools and non-school workplaces an emergency includes, but is not restricted to:
- fatality
- serious injury/serious assault/sexual assault
- siege/hostage/firearms

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- disappearance or removal of student
- bomb threat
- collapse/major damage to building or equipment
- motor vehicle collision/impact with the school
- fire in school building/bushfire
- impact by equipment/machinery/aircraf
- fumes/spill/leak/contamination by hazardous material
- outbreak of disease
- flood/wind storm or other natural event.

An emergency includes incidents which occur during the conduct of outdoor adventure activities, camps or excursions and during the normal travel time to or from the workplace.

Within this plan no distinction is drawn between a disaster and an emergency. The arrangements described in the plan apply to all emergencies, without being limited to an emergency of a particular type or size.

Emergencies may range in nature and intensity from small scale, localised incidents lasting minutes or hours affecting a single workplace, to large scale incidents requiring a commitment of resources over a period of days or months, requiring regional or state level coordination and possible assistance from external agencies.

Defining response   2.1.5

Response is that part of the emergency management process which begins immediately an emergency occurs and lasts until the risk to personal safety or further damage to property has been removed. The emergency services (primary agencies) have legal responsibility for coordinating and controlling the response to most types of emergencies.

The Department's obligations when responding to emergencies are to comply with the requests and directions of the responsible emergency service, and to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of those involved in the emergency are maintained.

It is expected that Department personnel will respond immediately to all potential or actual emergencies which affect the safety and wellbeing of students, staff or visitors.

Defining recovery 2.1.6

The *Emergency Management Act 1986* defines recovery as the process by which a community is helped to return to its proper level of functioning after an emergency. In the context of this plan, recovery is defined as an enabling and supportive process which allows individuals, families and school communities to attain a proper level of functioning through the provision of information, and specialist services including psychological and counselling support and resources.

Emergency management is not a sequential process. Recovery support may be required from the moment that an emergency begins and may run in parallel with response activity. In some circumstances, it may not be possible to initiate recovery activity until response measures have reduced the level of danger.

RESPONSE 3

Coordination and control during an emergency 3.1

Statewide coordination 3.1.1

The Deparment's Emergency and Security Management Branch coordinates the statewide response to emergencies. The manager of the Emergency and Security Management Branch is the state coordinator during emergencies.

State coordinator—emergency management 3.1.2

The state coordinator controls the Department's response to any emergency which affects workplaces affecting more than one region, which is confined to one region but is beyond the region's resources, or which is deemed by the state coordinator to require statewide coordination. The state coordinator is authorised by the Minister to take whatever action is deemed to be appropriate to resolve an emergency. This includes the authority to direct personnel, to appropriate and allocate resources, buildings or equipment for the duration of an emergency within the limitations of relevant legislation.

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Control during an emergency 3.1.3

When coordination of an emergency passes from the principal or officer in charge to the regional coordinator, a nominated officer at the site will take control of the response including decision making and the allocation of resources relating to the emergency within the limitations of the relevant legislation. In the case of significant emergencies under regional control, the state coordinator may attend the site of the emergency to provide support and advice.

Any decision to take control of the Department response at state level will be at the discretion of the state coordinator, following consultation with the relevant regional coordinators. The role of regional coordinators in these circumstances will be to implement decisions made by the state coordinator. Regional coordinators will retain responsibility for the activities of regional emergency management personnel.

When state level coordination is required, the state coordinator will take control of the Department response at the site including decision making and the allocation of resources relating to the emergency.

Education coordination centre 3.1.4

The education emergency coordination centre may be activated during significant emergencies which require extensive coordination. A specialist trauma support group comprising Department officers is on call twenty-four hours a day to respond to emergencies requiring state level coordination. The state coordinator activates the support group and is responsible for the operation of the education coordination centre. In other cases, group members may be directed to attend the site of the emergency to assist the state coordinator with coordination of Department activity. A list of statewide emergency management contact officers is included in the separate document titled *Education Emergency Management Directory* (restricted distribution).

Regional coordination 3.1.5

Each region is responsible for monitoring emergencies which occur within the region and for coordinating emergencies at regional level which are beyond the resources of the workplace. The regional emergency management coordinator, normally a regional assistant general manager, will determine when regional

coordination is required. An officer nominated by the regional coordinator may be directed to control response and recovery activity at the site of the emergency.

Regional coordination centre 3.1.6

A regional coordination centre may be established within the regional office by the regional coordinator during significant emergencies to coordinate information, communication and resources. The regional coordination centre should be physically isolated from normal regional activity during the emergency and should provide access to dedicated telephone and facsimile equipment to process all communications from the workplace. Regional office personnel would normally operate the centre.

Local coordination 3.1.7

The principal or officer in charge will normally be responsible for coordination and control during an emergency affecting a workplace in accordance with procedures described in local emergency management plans. When local resources are inadequate, when the emergency affects more than one workplace or when determined by the regional emergency management coordinator, the region will be responsible for control and coordination. In circumstances requiring statewide coordination, the state coordinator will be responsible for coordination.

Local coordination centre 3.1.8

The principal or officer in charge, as the emergency coordinator at the workplace, may establish a coordination centre during emergencies. The local emergency coordinator should be able to focus on the emergency free from other routine business associated with the running of the school or workplace. A local coordination centre should normally have access to telephones and facsimile equipment.

The Department of Human Services is the primary Government agency with responsibility for recovery in Victoria under the State emergency recovery plan. With the exception of large scale emergencies, the Department of Human Services will normally encourage the use of Department specialist support services to deliver recovery programs to those affected by emergencies. Coordination of Department recovery activity is consistent with the general principles and arrangements outlined in the Victorian Government's State emergency recovery plan.

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In the event of emergencies occurring which require the provision of recovery support to those affected, regional resources will normally be used when local resources are inadequate. Where resources are unavailable from within the region or where available regional resources are inadequate to meet long term-requirements of those affected, the state coordinator will arrange for the provision of support from other regions or from external government and non-government agencies. The state coordinator may nominate an officer to coordinate recovery activity.

A recovery needs assessment team will normally be convened by the nominated regional or state officer. It should comprise representatives from the Department and the affected workplace whose responsibility is to develop and implement a recovery program.

Department emergency management personnel involved in delivering specialist services may require defusing following an emergency. When required, these services will be provided by trained Department personnel or by psychologists contracted to provide services to the Department.

Requests for resources   3.1.9

Requests for equipment and other resources during an emergency will be met initially through the Department according to local or regional planning arrangements. Where the Department is unable to meet such requests, the local or regional police emergency response coordinator will be requested to provide resources. Where state level resources are required, requests should be forwarded to the state coordinator. Where accommodation, clothing, food, transport or similar items cannot be provided at the local or regional levels, the Department's state emergency management coordinator will request the state coordinator (police) to obtain them in accordance with arrangements in the State emergency response plan. If interpreters are required during an emergency requiring statewide coordination, they will be sought through the police emergency response coordinator.

Liaison with other education authorities   3.1.10

Emergency management information, advice and assistance will be provided to non-government workplaces on request during an emergency, subject to the availability of resources. The Association of Independent Schools of Victoria and the Catholic Education Office are represented on the State Education Emergency

Management Committee and have access to planning advice and information which is normally made available to government workplaces. During an emergency affecting a non-government workplace, the state coordinator will liaise with the emergency management officer from the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria or the Catholic Education Office.

Roles and responsibilities 3.2

State coordinator—emergency management 3.2.1

The state coordinator, through the Emergency and Security Management Branch, is responsible for:

- receiving emergency reports from schools and non-school workplaces
- notifying regions about emergencies reported by schools
- notifying emergencies to the emergency services
- reporting to the Minister, Secretary and senior officers
- provision of resources throughout the emergency
- liaison with state coordinators of emergency services
- inter-agency communication and coordination
- monitoring progress during the emergency
- communication with the regional emergency management coordinator
- management of the state education emergency coordination centre.

Role of regions 3.2.2

Regional offices play a key role in planning and in providing coordination, support or advice and in making resources available during emergencies. Regional personnel including specialist support staff, guidance officers and social workers, provide the first level of coordination and support when the emergency is beyond the local resources of the workplace. Regional roles and responsibilities are described in regional plans.

Regional coordinator—emergency management 3.2.3

The regional emergency management coordinator, normally an assistant general manager, is responsible for the effective use of Department resources to facilitate early resolution of the emergency, for responding to workplace requests during an emergency, meeting emergency services requests for information or resources,

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coordinating the timely supply of regional resources, liaising with regional coordinators of combat and support agencies, providing regular situation reports to the regional general manager and to the statewide Emergency and Security Management Branch.

Regional liaison officer—emergency management 3.2.4

The regional liaison officer, typically a suitably trained senior administrator from a school or non-school workplace, may be sent to the site of a serious emergency to consult with those affected, gather information, analyse response and recovery needs, liaise with emergency services and support agencies, and communicate regular situation reports to the regional office. At the direction of the regional coordinator, the regional liaison officer would control and direct Department emergency management activity at the scene.

Twenty-four hour emergency reports 3.3

All school and non-school workplaces are required to notify the Department's Emergency and Security Management Branch using the Department's twenty-four hour emergency telephone number immediately about all emergencies. Reports made to other locations by schools will be redirected to the Department's emergency telephone number.

The Emergency and Security Management Branch (or the state education coordination centre when activated) receives reports about workplace emergencies. The Emergency and Security Management Branch notifies the Minister's office, the Secretary and other senior officers within the Department and provides regular situation reports as required.

Schools must report emergencies 3.3.1

Schools and non-school workplaces must ensure that all emergencies are reported immediately to the relevant emergency service and to the Department's twenty-four-hour emergency telephone number. Workplace plans must ensure that an emergency which occurs during an activity which is being conducted away from the workplace, such as a camp, excursion or outdoor adventure activity, is reported immediately to the emergency services and to the Department.

Communications 3.3.2

Cellular telephones are also used to provide emergency mobile communications into the switched telephone network. Neither cellular telephone technology, nor two-way radio are anticipated to be capable of independently providing statewide communications coverage and may not provide coverage in other areas during an emergency. Emergency management plans should include provision for maintaining effective alternative communications during an emergency.

Establishing a coordination centre 3.3.3

When an emergency requires state level coordination, the state coordinator may authorise the opening of the state education coordination centre to maintain effective communications.

The state coordination centre is responsible for maintaining direct communication between the site of the emergency at the workplace or some other remote location in accordance with emergency response requirements.

Situation reports 3.3.4

Emergency situation reports will be provided to the Minister's office and the Secretary at regular intervals during a significant emergency. Workplaces can expect to receive requests for updated information at half-hourly intervals from the Emergency and Security Management Branch (or the coordination centre when activated). Information requested will include:

- name and location of workplace
- specific location of the emergency
- circumstances leading up to the emergency
- identity of all those present at the scene
- personal details about injured and uninjured
- emergency services and support agencies involved
- location of emergency services control centre
- name and rank of the emergency service commander
- contact telephone number at scene if available.

Department of Education emergency management plan

Briefing personnel 3.3.5

The local, regional or state coordinator is responsible for briefing personnel during an emergency. An initial briefing should take place as soon as information is available which indicates the extent of the emergency and again when an action plan has been developed. Where the nature of the emergency is such that Department emergency management personnel may be traumatised by their exposure to an emergency, recovery arrangements for managing trauma will be implemented. When Department resources are inadequate, specialist support will be sought according to arrangements outlined in the State emergency recovery plan.

Establishing a reception/information centre 3.3.6

The state coordinator may establish an information or reception centre using Department resources to provide for evacuees or others seeking information about those involved in the emergency. The state coordinator may also make Department facilities available as a venue for liaison, command or other operational purposes at the request of the emergency services.

Emergency services requests for information 3.3.7

The emergency services may seek information about government or non-government workplaces from the Department during an emergency. The Emergency and Security Management Branch will attempt to meet any request for information from the emergency services concerning government or non-government workplaces during emergencies.

Media liaison 3.3.8

Communication with the media about the emergency will be established by the officer in charge of the primary agency. The police will often be responsible for media liaison during an emergency. Media liaison concerning workplaces and the Department's role in significant emergencies will be provided by the Department's media liaison unit or state coordinator following consultation with the officer in charge of the relevant primary agency or the police media liaison officer. In other circumstances, media liaison may occur at the regional level.

Media may be managed at the local level in some instances. Principals must ensure that they have the authority to communicate with the media concerning each particular emergency. Comment should be restricted to operational matters associated with the emergency, the school's response to it and support being provided to assist the school community. All information should be cleared first with the Department and primary authority (usually police) before it is publicly released.

RECOVERY 4

Managing trauma and recovery programs 4.1

Introduction 4.1.1

The Department is obliged as a Government agency to respond to emergencies affecting schools and workplaces in accordance with the provisions of the *Emergency Management Act 1986*, the State emergency response plan and the State emergency recovery plan. This section of the plan recognises the role of the Department of Human Services (DHS) as the primary agency for recovery in Victoria and DHS's expectation that the majority of emergencies will be managed using resources available within the Department.

Increased awareness in the general community concerning the potential effects of emergencies on individuals and the value of early intervention as a preventive strategy has led to increasing demands from school communities for the provision of specialist support following exposure to emergencies. In the context of the Department's recovery planning arrangements, increasing demands are being placed on Department guidance officers and social workers to provide such support to schools and workplaces. Services to staff are also provided by psychologists contracted to the Department.

Principles 4.1.2

The management of recovery programs is based on the following principles:

The level of support and the requirement for specialist intervention is dependent on the impact of the emergency on those affected. Not all emergencies require major psychological intervention.

Department of Education emergency management plan

A community-based recovery model which uses existing local organisational structures and processes will be used whenever possible to implement recovery programs. These structures within a workplace provide a recovery context within which emergencies can be managed effectively. Those providing specialist support will build on existing organisational and group strengths through consultation to enhance the effectiveness of recovery programs.

Individuals and groups are largely responsible for the effectiveness of their own recovery following an emergency. They should be involved in and have control over decisions which are made concerning their recovery. Department support aims to empower those affected to make effective decisions using the structures and processes with which they are most familiar.

Personnel involved in needs assessment and subsequent service delivery will include Department guidance officers and social workers, including external consultants where appropriate, who have completed Department approved training programs and who are experienced in the range of specialist recovery services.

Specialist support is available to Department service delivery personnel as well as to those affected by the emergency. Specialist trauma management, including defusing, will normally be provided by suitably trained psychologists and social workers, including external consultants where appropriate, who have completed Department approved training programs.

Managing the recovery process 4.1.3

Under the State emergency recovery plan, the Department of Human Services (DHS) is the primary Government agency responsible for coordinating the recovery process arising from large-scale emergencies. DHS would normally not become involved in coordinating recovery activity arising from small-scale emergencies.

Most emergencies which affect workplaces are considered by DHS to be too small to justify implementation of arrangements under the State emergency recovery plan. Where suitably qualified personnel exist, DHS would normally encourage the Department to undertake most of the recovery activity directed towards workplaces, even during large-scale emergencies.

Emergency management activity within the Department is coordinated at regional and state levels. At the regional level, it is important for officers with emergency response responsibilities and for those responsible for recovery to communicate regularly to ensure the provision of coordinated assistance to affected workplaces.

Regular and detailed situation reports will be required from the site of the emergency to facilitate planning including the identification of resource requirements. Regular situation reports should enable the Minister, Secretary and senior officers to be kept fully informed about developments as they happen. Regular situation reports also provide the basis for determining the timing and extent of Department support required during the recovery process.

The purpose of recovery programs 4.1.4

Students, staff and workplace communities affected by an emergency may never return to the level of functioning they enjoyed prior to their involvement in the emergency. Even people who are able to return to a suitable level of functioning commonly report that their lives are profoundly different as a consequence of having experienced an emergency.

The recovery process aims to return individuals to a proper level of functioning, not necessarily that which existed prior to the emergency. In some cases, it will be possible to begin recovery activity while the emergency services are still managing the response component. In others, it may not be possible to commence recovery until the emergency services have completed their work.

Providing support to those affected 4.1.5

Department guidance officers and social workers, who have been trained in trauma counselling will normally deliver recovery services to affected workplaces.

Workplaces may have neither the experience nor the resources to implement a recovery program without support. They may not recognise a need to implement a specific recovery program. Department support services will be made available as a matter of course in most cases.

Department of Education emergency management plan

Levels of support 4.2

Minimum support 4.2.1

The minimum level of recovery support appropriate to minor events might involve a telephone call from the support centre to the workplace. This may result in an agreement between the workplace and the centre not to provide further support, or to provide support when a specific request for assistance is made.

Education and information 4.2.2

The first level of intervention, if required, may include the provision of information to the affected community about what has happened and about behaviors which adults and children may display in both the short- and long-term.

Factual information presented to students, staff and parents helps individuals understand what has happened to them and minimises the development of rumors. Information sessions and meetings should normally be arranged as soon as possible after the emergency.

Consulting or counselling 4.2.3

It may be necessary for a variety of interventions to be considered ranging from individual or group work conducted by an expert team, to consultation or counselling provided by trained staff, or referral to external specialists for counselling.

Duration of recovery programs 4.2.4

A recovery program involving short-term intervention strategies, and intensive use of personnel and other resources may last up to six to eight weeks.

Managing trauma 4.3

Some emergencies to which the Department is required to respond have the potential to traumatise individuals or groups who have been exposed to the event. The management of trauma requires specialist management and intervention under the supervision of guidance officers or social workers, and external consultants where appropriate, to assist those affected.

Regions will provide this specialist support in the first instance using specialist support staff according to arrangements described in regional emergency management plans. Detailed arrangements which recognise resource constraints and differential abilities to deliver recovery services will be developed by regions and will include local plans. It is expected that arrangements similar to those in use within regions will be adopted and incorporated in an emergency management plan for state office personnel.

Reporting traumatic incidents   4.3.1

The Department's twenty-four emergency telephone number should be used to report emergencies including those involving possible trauma. By definition, a traumatic incident is also an emergency and should be reported immediately.

The regional emergency management coordinator, normally an assistant general manager, is responsible for decision making during an emergency including the commitment of resources. Recovery action should not be initiated by specialist support staff independently of the regional coordinator.

Needs assessment   4.3.2

While coordination of decision making at senior management level in the regional office is important, it is expected that procedures for alerting regional and specialist personnel required to participate in an on-site needs assessment will be simple and promptly implemented.

Composition of assessment team   4.3.3

An on-site needs assessment coordinated by an officer nominated by the regional emergency management coordinator and the on-site principal or officer in charge will normally be conducted by a small team of trained support staff. The assessment team may consult with staff, students and others affected to determine what support and specialist assistance, if any, is required and to develop an action plan for management of the incident.

The assessment team is responsible for identifying the size and composition of any team required to deliver support services to the affected workplace.

Department of Education emergency management plan

Roles and responsibilities 4.4

Local and regional arrangements should enable teams to be formed at short notice. Geographic and staffing constraints may result in different arrangements being developed to suit the requirements of different regions, but should facilitate mutual support across local or regional boundaries when required if personnel are not available locally. This may be also be a particular requirement for emergencies which involve state office personnel.

In addition to the direct support provided by guidance officers and social workers, administrative and clerical personnel may be required to support specialist staff. It is anticipated that local and regional arrangements will ensure that clerical or administrative support to specialist staff is available at short notice.

Regional responsibility for decision making, communication of information, and the provision and control of resources should be determined before regional commitment to an emergency occurs. Responsibilities would normally be determined by the regional emergency management coordinator.

Specialist support 4.4.1

Department guidance officers and social workers are responsible for the delivery of specialist services arising from emergencies. The nominated officer responsible for on site coordination of support is responsible for assembling a team of specialist and non-specialist staff to suit the needs of the particular emergency.

Service delivery teams should be as small as possible. Team members should be available for the duration of any recovery program. A team leader will be appointed by the nominated officer and will normally report to the regional emergency management coordinator.

Following notification about an emergency from the Emergency and Security Management Branch, the regional emergency management coordinator will normally require a needs assessment to be conducted at the site of the incident in consultation with those affected. This will happen as a matter of course in most cases. As well as identifying the emotional needs of those affected, the needs assessment will also identify issues of concern related to physical safety, legal liability and media mangement.

Statewide recovery network 4.4.2

The statewide recovery network comprises Department guidance officers and social workers with extensive experience and expertise, particularly in the management of trauma. Group members are voluntarily on twenty-four hour call from the Emergency and Security Management Branch to provide advice and support to regional personnel who may be required to manage emergencies locally.

The recovery network performs two functions during emergencies. A team member would normally participate in a needs assessment when relevant expertise or experience is not readily available to local personnel. Following the needs assessment, the function changes to one of providing personal and professional support to regional personnel responsible for service delivery, including personal defusing.

Managing post-traumatic stress 4.5

Post-traumatic stress 4.5.1

Post-traumatic stress is a recognised condition that may affect someone who has been exposed to an emergency. Department guidance officers and social workers would normally be used to assess whether an emergency has the potential to traumatise those who have been exposed to it.

Community-based recovery models 4.5.2

Within the Department's community-based recovery model, it is important that the potential for acute stress or post-traumatic stress is recognised. The needs assessment team should include specialists who have been trained and who are experienced in the identification of the range of reactions associated with traumatic events.

Within this community-based recovery model, psychological debriefing has been used at workplaces. The debriefing component provides a flexible range of strategies to assist in the defusing of staff, students and others. In each case, guidance officers, social workers and, where appropriate, trained external consultants are responsible for conducting debriefing.

The use of a flexible psychological debriefing model for the management of trauma ensures a consistent approach to the management of post-traumatic stress among students and employees across schools and other workplaces. It also facilitates utilisation of service delivery personnel across regional boundaries in cases where the availability of trained personnel is limited.

Department of Education emergency management plan

Sample school emergency plan

Phoenix College
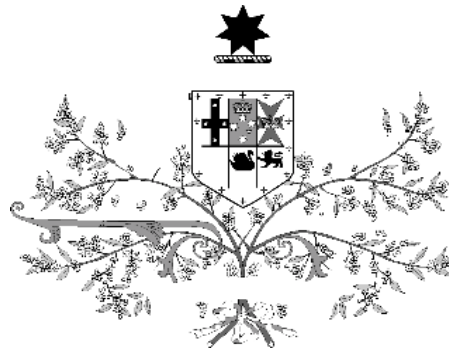
Emergency management plan

1   WHAT'S IN THE PLAN

1.1   The plan describes the school and its environment, the potential hazards to which it is likely to be exposed and the manner in which emergencies will be managed by the school. It assumes that staff and students will be familiar with its contents and will be regularly drilled in the procedures to be adopted during an emergency. It assumes that preventive measures will have been implemented to reduce the impact of an emergency which occurs.

An emergency includes the following:

- fatality
- serious injury/serious assault/sexual assault
- siege/hostage/firearms
- disappearance or removal of student
- bomb threat
- collapse/major damage to building or equipment
- motor vehicle collision/impact with school
- impact by equipment/machinery/aircraft
- fire in school building/bushfire
- fumes/spill/leak/contamination by hazardous material
- outbreak of disease
- flood/wind storm or other natural event.

1.2   The plan is intended to be flexible. Procedures have been developed which should assist the school to manage emergencies ranging in nature and intensity from small-scale localised incidents lasting minutes or hours and which are managed by the school, to large-scale incidents which require external assistance and which may last for several days. It identifies roles and responsibilities of staff, students and visitors during an emergency. It describes actions to be followed in the case of specific types of emergencies.

1.3   All incidents likely to affect the safety and wellbeing of students, teachers or visitors are to be reported immediately and responded to as soon as possible. The safety and wellbeing of all people exposed to the emergency are to be considered at all stages of the emergency.

Sample school emergency plan

1.4 An emergency may have effects on those involved lasting long after the initial crisis has been resolved. The school recognises that in addition to implementing procedures to resolve the emergency quickly, the school may require support to assist the school community to return to normal functioning.

1.5 The plan is to be reviewed annually by the school council policy committee. In the event of an emergency, the plan is to be reviewed as soon as possible after the event to determine whether procedures in the plan were followed and whether they were adequate.

1.6 A copy of the plan is to be sent to local police and fire authorities for endorsement and to ensure that safe and correct procedures have been identified for use during emergencies.

2 ABOUT THE SCHOOL

2.1 Phoenix College is located in a small rural community which draws its students from the nearby town and outlying farms. The school comprises two north-south facing timber-walled buildings with corrugated iron roofs typical of buildings which were constructed around 1900. In keeping with the rural environment in which it is located, the school maintains a three hectare nature reserve on the western boundary of the school. The school has a static population of around 130 students. Most students travel by bus to the school. The majority of the staff live at Haven, a provincial centre 30 km south of the school.

2.2 The school lies adjacent to a major interstate highway in the foothills of the Conflagration Range. The highway is heavily used by for transport of road freight. Heavily timbered hills surrounding the school are intersected by the highway and a railway line which services Pong Chemicals to the south of the town.

3 IDENTIFYING THE RISKS

3.1 The school is at risk each year during the bushfire season. It is particularly vulnerable to bushfire as it is surrounded by heavily timbered and hilly country. The timber construction of the school

makes it vulnerable to fire at all times of the year. A section of the school has been developed to provide a refuge in case of bushfire.

3.2   The risk of exposure to hazardous chemicals which are transported along the highway and by rail is high given the traffic volume and a history of serious collisions nearby.

3.3   During winter, low lying areas near the school often flood preventing access to the school. The school has previously been closed for up to five days because of surrounding high waters. The school is reliant on tanks for all its water requirements. Water use is commonly restricted during summer months because of low rainfall. The woodlands near the school provide a regular venue for school activities including bushwalking and orienteering. It presents a risk for students/staff who become lost, suffer physical injury including snake bite. In the event of unauthorised removal of a student from the school, the bush would offer cover if it were used as a means of escape.

3.4   The school participates in a regular camps and excursions program to locations which are a considerable distance from the school and emergency services. The school owns and uses a former school building for Year 6 camps in addition to privately-owned camps for other year levels. Camps are not conducted in fire risk areas during the fire danger period.

3.5   A local doctor services the town three half-days a week. At all other times emergency medical treatment, ambulance, fire brigade and police must come from Haven, which is likely to result in a minimum attendance time of thirty minutes. If assistance must come from elsewhere, delays of up to ninety minutes can be anticipated.

4   COORDINATING THE SCHOOL'S REPONSE

4.1   **Reporting an emergency in the school.** Students should report an incident immediately to an adult within the school. Teachers should report an incident immediately to the principal or office staff. All emergencies are to be reported to the office. The principal or secretary will immediately report the emergency to the emergency services and to the Department. All emergencies are to be reported to the Department's Emergency and Security Management Branch on (03) 9589 6266.

Sample school emergency plan

4.2 **Reporting an emergency at a camp or excursion.** An emergency which occurs during a camp/excursion is to be reported by the supervising teacher to the emergency services. The principal is then to be advised. The principal will attend if the incident is within an hour's travelling time from the school. In other cases, the school will ask the regional office to send an officer to the incident to assist staff at the scene and to liaise with the school.

4.3 **Alerting the school.** Students will be alerted by means of a warning siren across the public address system, or if power is unavailable by the portable warning siren. An announcement will be made instructing staff and students about action to be taken.

4.4 **Emergency to be coordinated from the principal's office.** The coordinator will manage the emergency from the principal's office, or other alternative safe area. For the duration of the emergency, staff should not enter the coordinator's office except when undertaking a task directly related to the emergency.

5   ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 **Principal to coordinate activity during an emergency.** In the absence of the principal, the assistant principal, senior school or junior school coordinator will carry out the role of coordinator. One of these people will be at the school at all times.

5.2 **Teachers will be directed by the coordinator during the emergency** and should not initiate any action related to the emergency without the coordinator's authorisation. This does not prevent a teacher taking action which minimises the nature of the emergency such as using a fire extinguisher on a fire or administering first-aid to a student to reduce the effects of an injury. Any staff member given a task to complete by the coordinator must advise the coordinator when it has been completed.

5.3 **The coordinator is responsible for:**

- notification of emergency services and the regional office
- alerting staff and students about the emergency
- evacuation of staff, students and visitors

- provision of resources to manage the emergency
- liaison with emergency services
- delegation of duties to staff as required
- communication with staff, students and parents
- maintenance of staff and student welfare.

5.4 **Teachers are responsible for the safe and orderly evacuation of students** when instructed by the coordinator to do so. Teachers will ensure that students are accounted for and will check storerooms and toilets as indicated on the classroom emergency action card. The attendance roll, student record cards and emergency action cards are to be taken to the evacuation assembly area.

5.5 **Turn off all appliances if time permits** including stoves, heaters, pilot lights, light switches. Close doors and windows before leaving the classroom.

5.6 **Teachers must supervise their students at all times.** If directed to another task by the coordinator, it is the responsibility of the class teacher to arrange alternative supervision before leaving the students.

5.7 **General office staff will deal with routine enquiries** from staff and will assist the coordinator during an emergency. Office staff will be responsible for general telephone communications, including notification of parents, at the direction of the coordinator.

6 COMMUNICATIONS: KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH EVERYONE

6.1 **A warning siren will be sounded when there is an emergency** to alert the school. An information message broadcast over the public address system or by a runner to individual classrooms will advise students and teachers about action to be taken.

6.2 **The general office telephone is only to be used for emergency communications.** The school has two telephone lines. The principal's telephone is to be used during an emergency by the coordinator to liaise with emergency services and the region's emergency management office. The emergency services and the regional agency management officer are to be notified immediately about any emergency. The general office telephone will be used for all other communications. To minimise overloading the school telephone, calls must be restricted and should be brief.

Sample school emergency plan

6.3 **A printout of student records is to be taken by office staff** if an evacuation of the school is required. Office staff are required to maintain back-up disks of all computer-based information at a location remote from the school. Arrangements have been made with Haven High School for temporary use of their computer facilities if the office computer remains inaccessible following an emergency.

6.4 **Teachers are to take class records** including attendance rolls, student record cards and emergency action cards with them if the classroom is to be evacuated.

6.5 **An information centre will be established to communicate with parents** who arrive at the school. In the event that the media arrives at the school, they should be directed to the coordinator.

7 ALL ABOUT EVACUATION

7.1 **The coordinator will issue evacuation instructions** to classes closest to the danger zone followed by classes further away from the danger area. When moving to the designated evacuation area students must be moved away from the danger zone and not towards or through the affected area. Teachers should not evacuate unless instructed to do so by the coordinator.

7.2 **Teachers are responsible for the safety and supervision of their students** during the evacuation and for the duration of the emergency. No teacher is to leave students unsupervised. If a teacher is directed by the coordinator to perform a task which prevents effective supervision being maintained, it is the teacher's responsibility to arrange for alternative supervision before engaging in other tasks.

7.3 **The coordinator will specify the type of evacuation required from one of the following:**

- within the building
- to another building
- within the school ground
- beyond the school.

7.4 **Evacuation within the building** may occur when the danger is confined to a section of one wing of the school.

7.5 **Evacuation to another building** may occur when the danger is confined to one wing of the school.

7.6 **Evacuation within the school ground** may occur if the danger zone extends to all school buildings, but not to open areas elsewhere around the school.

7.7 **Evacuation beyond the school** may be required if the emergency affects the whole school.

7.8 **Food, water, shelter and toilet facilities** will be required if evacuation occurs in adverse weather or is likely to be prolonged. Arrangements have been made to use the pavilion at the Phoenix Recreation Reserve which has toilets and drinking water. If it is necessary, the coordinator will arrange for lunch to be supplied by the Red Cross.

7.9 **No student is to leave the school or the evacuation area with a parent or other adult** unless specific authorisation to do so has been issued by the coordinator.

7.10 **Parents attending the school are to be directed to the information centre** where a member of staff nominated by the coordinator will be available to provide information concerning the welfare of students and other information about the emergency. The coordinator will also designate the area to be established as an information centre.

8 SUPPORTING THOSE AFFECTED

8.1 The principal will convene a recovery management group when staff or students have been traumatised or are likely to suffer long-term effects as a result of their exposure to an emergency. The group which will include staff, students, and Department support personnel will be responsible for development and implementation of a recovery program to those affected.

8.2 The region office will normally ensure that recovery support is provided to the school. Support will normally be provided by district psychologists and social workers, and external consultants engaged by the Department where necessary.

Sample school emergency plan

9   EMERGENCY CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

POLICE: D24 MELBOURNE 000
                           D24 COUNTRY

AMBULANCE: MELBOURNE 000
                           COUNTRY NUMBERS

FIRE BRIGADE: CFA FIRE CALL NUMBER
                           MFB MELBOURNE 000

DOCTOR: LOCAL NUMBER

HOSPITAL: LOCAL EMERGENCY CENTRE

DEPARTMENT: TWENTY-FOUR HOURS: (03) 9589 6266

10   SITE PLAN

The site plan identifies key features for emergency use:

• access roads and gates
• water, gas, electricity connections
• evacuation assembly areas
• locations of hazardous materials
• fire protection equipment such as hose reels and hydrants.

Phoenix College site plan

assembly area 3   staff car park

entrance gates

assembly area 4

gas

● extinguisher

● extinguisher

● extinguisher

electricity ● extinguisher

hydrant
hydrant ○

● extinguisher ●

extinguisher ●

hydrant
○

● extinguisher

extinguisher ●

● extinguisher

extinguisher ●

○ hydrant

assembly area 1   oval   assembly area 2

gate

gate
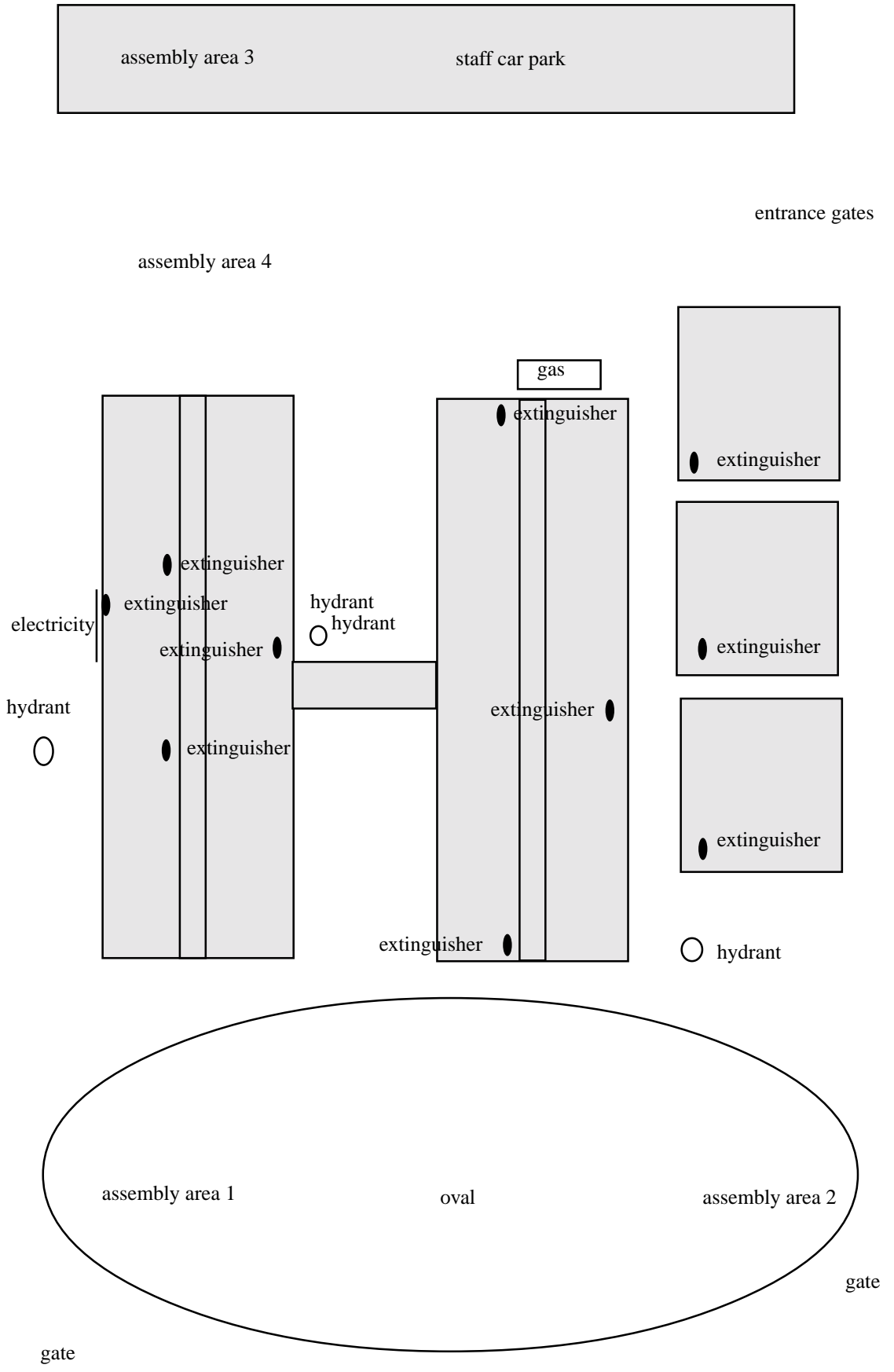
Sample school emergency plan

Short-term tasks—within the first twenty-four hours

Set aside five minutes to calm down and collect your thoughts. Implement the school emergency plan. Consider the level of response that might be required, and discuss possible responses with others.

Immediate tasks

- [ ] notify the Emergency and Security Management Branch by telephone on (03) 9589 6266. This will ensure that the regional office is notified and that guidance officers and social workers are notified
- [ ] notify the emergency services using their emergency numbers
- [ ] ensure that staff and students are safe from injury or harm
- [ ] record details on the *Initial emergency record* and *Emergency message record* forms
- [ ] establish a school emergency team to coordinate the response
- [ ] allocate responsibilities to individual staff
- [ ] allocate responsibility for evacuation and assembly of staff and students
- [ ] allocate responsibility for management of information including telephone calls
- [ ] allocate responsibility for coordinating media requests for information
- [ ] allocate responsibility for provision of information parents who arrive at the school
- [ ] coordinate routine school activities including the teaching program
- [ ] notify teachers and ancillary staff about the emergency
- [ ] notify parents of students first, then brothers and sisters in the school
- [ ] establish a recovery room for affected students and a waiting room for parents
- [ ] inform students within the school
- [ ] ask for staff volunteers to monitor the recovery room
- [ ] actively seek information from the Department of Education, police, hospital or elsewhere
- [ ] inform school council
- [ ] inform the school community via letter or newsletter
- [ ] monitor school community reactions and support those in care-giving roles
- [ ] liaise with outside agencies, including the emergency services
- [ ] set aside time to brief key personnel and to review responses

Initial emergency record

Date ....

Time of notification ....

Name of person taking the call ....

Position ....

Name of person reporting the incident ....

Contact telephone number ....

DETAILS (describe the incident in as much detail as possible describing who was involved, how, where and when it occurred, who is injured, nature and extent of injuries, where is everyone now, what action is being taken to help)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS REQUIRED

Principal notified   YES   NO   Time _____

Other school staff   YES   NO   Time _____

Emergency services notified   YES   NO   Time _____

(which services, record names of officers, stations, telephone contacts)

Emergency and Security Management Branch notified YES   NO   Time _____
by telephone on (03) 9589 6266

Emergency message record

Time .... Message from   ....

Action required ☐   ....
....

Completed ☐   ....

Message taken by ....

Time .... Message from   ....

Action required ☐   ....
....

Completed ☐   ....

Message taken by ....

Time .... Message from   ....

Action required ☐   ....
....

Completed ☐   ....

Message taken by ....

Time .... Message from   ....

Action required ☐   ....
....

Completed ☐   ....

Message taken by ....

Time .... Message from   ....

Action required ☐   ....
....

Completed ☐   ....

Message taken by ....

Emergency telephone contact list

Police
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Hospital/doctor
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Other emergency services
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....

Essential services: water, gas
....
....
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Key school contacts
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Department of Education
Emergency and Security
Management Branch
....
....
....
....

Neighboring schools
....
....
....

Other community bodies
....
....
....

MEDIA RELEASE

Table of Contents

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

Provide support, rest, comfort

Provide a structured environment where the rules are clear

Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event
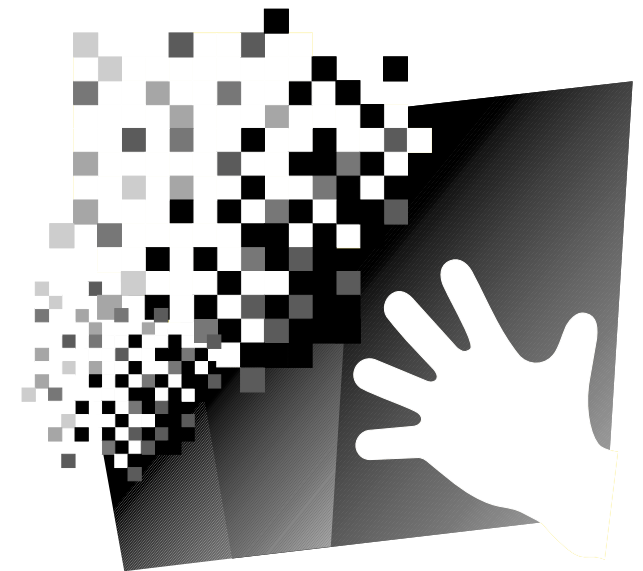
Provide time to draw and play

Provide ongoing, consistent care

Provide a predictable routine

Provide security and reassurance to counter separation anxiety

Monitor the child and note any change in temperament and behavior

Common reactions to traumatic events in the pre-school years

Reactions that may occur following a traumatic experience

Your child has become aware of an incident that may cause distress. Children experience emotional and physical responses in crises. Their understanding of what has happened and their imagination may add to their fear of the event. Many people believe that young children are too young to be aware of, or to be affected by, the crisis. This is not the case.

Your child may show concern about the crisis by talking about what has happened, or by playing games with aspects of the event in them. Some children express their concerns through drawing or repeating the incident in their play. It is not unusual for young children to show their distress by returning to earlier behaviors such as being more clingy and less self-reliant.

Children will look for reassurance from adults about their own safety and that of important people in their lives. Most of all children need honest, age appropriate information to their questions and to be comforted and understood.

Most of the behaviors listed are short-term and disappear within a short period. If the behaviors persist, it may be useful to speak with a counsellor or your doctor. Even before children have mastered language to express traumatic experiences, they can carry such events in a non-verbal form. They give words to the memories when they have mastered language.

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

Tearfulness

Unwillingness to be left alone

Aggression

Fearfulness

Anxiety

Overactive behavior/restlessness

Apathy

Lack of cooperation

Irritability

Return to younger behavior

Excessive concern for others

Difficulty coping with change

Display of awareness of events beyond age expectations, particularly in play

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Sleep disturbance

Bowel and bladder difficulties

Small ailments requiring comforting

Acute awareness of things and events

General arousal

Increased jumpiness and uneasiness

IMPACT ON THINKING

Reduced attention span

Reduced ability to play constructively

Active fantasy life, may replay the event and change details

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

Provide support, rest, comfort

Provide a structured environment where the rules are clear

Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event

Provide time to draw and play

Provide ongoing, consistent care

Provide a predictable routine

Provide security and reassurance to counter separation anxiety

Monitor the child and note any change in temperament and behavior

Common reactions to traumatic events in the lower primary school years

Victoria The Place To Be

Victoria State Government
Department of
Education,
Employment and Training

Reactions that may occur following a traumatic experience

Your child has become aware of an incident that may cause distress. Children experience emotional and physical responses in crises. Their understanding of what has happened and their imagination may add to their fear of the event. Many people believe that young children are too young to be aware of, or to be affected by, the crisis. This is not the case.

Your child may show concern about the crisis by talking about what has happened, or by playing games with aspects of the event in them. Some children express their concerns through drawing or repeating the incident in their play. It is not unusual for young children to show their distress by returning to earlier behaviors such as being more clingy and less self-reliant.

Children will look for reassurance from adults about their own safety and that of important people in their lives. Most of all children need honest, age appropriate information to their questions and to be comforted and understood.

Most of the behaviors listed are short-term and disappear within a short period. If the behaviors persist, it may be useful to speak with a counsellor or your doctor.

Even before children have mastered language to express traumatic experiences, they can carry such events in a non-verbal form. They give words to the memories when they have mastered language.

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

Tearfulness
Unwillingness to be left alone
Confusion
Aggression
Fearfulness
Lie telling
Anxiety
Generalised anger
Overactive behavior, restlessness
Lack of cooperation
Irritability
Return to younger behavior
Reduction in talking
Excessive concern for others
Difficulty coping with change
Display of awareness beyond age expectations
Acute awareness of things and events
Helplessness—passive responses
Difficulty identifying what is wrong
Sensitivity to media coverage

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Change in eating habits
Nausea
Sleep disturbances
Bowel and bladder problems
Clumsiness
Headaches
Small ailments requiring comforting

IMPACT ON THINKING

Preoccupation with trauma
Reduced attention span
Reduced ability to play constructively
Memory problems
Confusion
Seeing the event over and over
Compensatory themes in play which may involve killing the perpetrator or creating a super hero for retribution
Anxiety related to incomplete understanding of death

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

Provide support, rest and comfort

Provide realistic, age appropriate information about the event and address the distortions

Provide time to talk about events, fears, dreams

Help identify traumatic reminders and anxieties and encourage children not to generalise

Develop a supportive environment that allows the expression of anger, sadness

Confirm that these feelings are normal

Encourage support networks

Identify physical sensations felt during the event

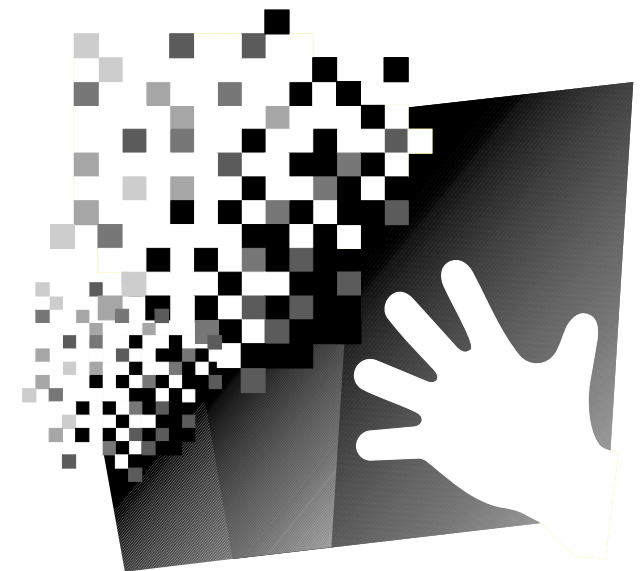Encourage constructive activities on behalf of injured or deceased

Help child to retain positive memories when working through intrusive traumatic memories

Provide a structured and predictable environment to provide a sense of security

Monitor the child and note any changes in temperament and behavior

Encourage child to let significant others know about the event

Common reactions to traumatic events in the upper primary school years

Victoria The Place To Be

State Government **Victoria** Department of Education, Employment and Training

Reactions that may occur following a traumatic experience

Your child has become aware of an incident that may cause distress. Children experience emotional and physical responses in crises. Their understanding of what has happened and their imagination may add to their fear of the event. Many people believe that young children are too young to be aware of, or to be affected by, the crisis. This is not the case.

Your child may show concern about the crisis by talking about what has happened, or by playing games with aspects of the event in them. Some children express their concerns through drawing or repeating the incident in their play. It is not unusual for young children to show their distress by returning to earlier behaviors such as being more clingy and less self-reliant.

Children will look for reassurance from adults about their own safety and that of important people in their lives. Most of all children need honest, age appropriate information to their questions and to be comforted and understood.

Most of the behaviors listed are short-term and disappear within a short period. If the behaviors persist, it may be useful to speak with a counsellor or your doctor.

Even before children have mastered language to express traumatic experiences, they can carry such events in a non-verbal form. They give words to the memories when they have mastered language.

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

Preoccupation with own actions during the event

Specific fears set off by reminders or when alone

Retelling or replaying the event

Reluctance to express feelings

Concern about own and others safety

Reckless, invulnerable behavior

Interest in parents response to the event

Concern for parents recovery

Disturbed grief responses

Reluctance to disturb parents with own anxieties

Refusal to go to school

Excessive concern for victims and their families

Competition with brothers and sisters

Displaced anger, aggression

Insecurity

Regressive behavior

Failure to perform responsibilities

Emotional labelling of common reactions

IMPACT ON THINKING

Interference with concentration and learning

Distortion of the event

Fear of ghosts

Preoccupation with the traumatic event

Impaired memory and recall

Intrusive recollections

Preoccupation with revenge

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Headaches

Visual and perceptual problems

Sleep disturbances

Nausea

Skin problems

Reckless behavior

FIRST-AID SUPPORT

Provide support, rest, comfort

Provide realistic, age appropriate, information about the event

Encourage discussion of the event emphasising realistic limitations of what could have been done

Encourage peer acceptance and understanding of emotional responses

Provide information about safe ways of relieving psychological discomfort

Encourage postponing radical life decisions

Link attitude changes to the impact of the event

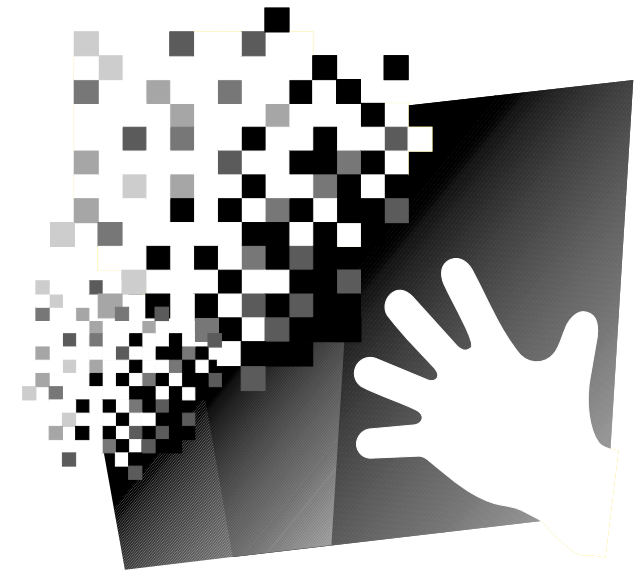Acknowledge significance of event for them

Encourage support networks

Encourage constructive activities on part of injured or deceased
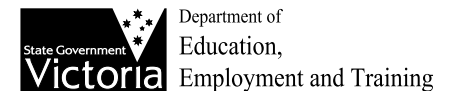
Help to hold on to positive memories as they work through the more intrusive traumatic events

Encourage child to let significant others know about the event

Common reactions to traumatic events in the pre-adolescent and adolescent years

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Reactions that may occur following a traumatic experience

Your son or daughter has become aware of an incident that may cause distress. Adolescents may experience a range of emotional and physical responses at a time of crisis such as this.

Most of these responses are transitory and will disappear within a short time. If these behaviors persist, it is useful to consult with a counsellor or your local doctor.

Young people may show their concern about the event by talking about what has happened or by writing about it.

Young people often choose to be with their friends when something traumatic occurs. They will group together to discuss what happened and to talk about their feelings. They may feel self-conscious about their emotional reactions to the event.

It is not unusual for adolescents to show their distress by becoming less dependent. Some may feel reluctant to sleep in their own rooms, preferring to sleep with parents for reassurance.

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS

Decreased school performance

Attention seeking

Rebellion at school or at home

Competition with brother or sisters

Loss of interest in usual activities

Lack of emotion

Need to repeatedly go over details of event

Detachment, shame, guilt

Fear of being labelled abnormal

Self-consciousness about emotional responses (fear and vulnerability)

Increase in self-destructive, accident prone behaviour (drugs, sexual)

Life threatening re-enactment

Premature entrance into adulthood or inhibition to leave home

Strong identification with peers

Mood swings

Need to conform with peers in response to event

Truancy

PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Headaches

Aches and pains

Appetite disorders

Sleep disorders

Skin disorders

IMPACT ON THINKING

Recall of vivid disturbing images

Radical attitude changes

Memory disorders

Poor concentration

Cognitive distortion of the event

Preoccupation with trauma