

MacKillop College



Policy: Crisis Care and Counselling

Introduction

Health and safety is not only about physical health and safety. It also extends to psychological and emotional well-being. The school needs to be able to provide support and help in the form of counselling to both students and staff at times of personal crisis and after critical incidents. There are many personal crisis situations involving both students and staff which can occur at any time in a school. These include:

- death in a family
- family break-up
- personal relationship problems
- drug or alcohol problems
- suicidal thoughts
- depression and stress
- academic and employment concerns
- adolescent insecurity
- bullying, intimidation or harassment.

Critical incidents are incidents which are outside the range of the ordinary daily routine of a school. They will usually create strong emotional and psychological responses in all people who are in some way associated with the incident. Examples of critical incidents are:

- death of a student or staff member (eg accident or suicide)
- tragedy on an excursion or on the way to or from school
- floods or fires
- allegations of sexual misconduct involving students or teachers
- criminal activity involving school staff or on school premises
- bomb threats.

Objective

MacKillop College is committed to:

- providing confidential, professional and caring support for staff and students in crisis and in need of advice on personal, academic and professional matters
- ensuring that systems are in place to deal with emergency situations in the school and that those systems include the provision of appropriate follow up care and counselling as needed.

MacKillop College will ensure that:

- information will be dealt with confidentially within the framework of recognised mandatory reporting requirements
- there is recent and relevant information about staff and students
- a crisis management team is established, including school and specialist personnel from the community, to deal with school crisis situations and provide for follow up care, as needed

- there are emergency procedures documented for a range of crises with nominated persons for specific roles, including the provision of counselling services
- there is long-term monitoring of persons involved in crisis situations
- reporting and recording of crisis incidents are carried out so that evaluation and review of systems, including the provision of follow up care, can be undertaken at regular intervals.

Principles

The school has a clear duty under occupational health and safety (OHS) legislation to care for staff who may need care or counselling as a result of their work duties. Obvious examples include:

- staff suffering stress or drug and alcohol problems where work duties are a contributing factor
- post-traumatic stress disorders after:
 - being involved in a violent incident, eg student or parental assault on a teacher
 - witnessing or assisting in an incident at the school, eg a serious accident or fatality.

The school also has a duty of care for the well-being of its students in situations where their presence at the school is a contributing factor in the need for help.

Managing Crises & Counselling

There are three main aspects to the management of critical incidents, other personal crisis situations, grief and counselling:

- making suitable preparations, such as deciding on procedures to be followed in the event of a crisis
- implementing those procedures in a sensitive manner to minimise the trauma, should the need arise
- providing counselling or access to specialist help if required.

Critical incidents

Schools need to be able to respond quickly to a critical incident which involves school staff and/or students. If an incident occurs, a crisis management team may need to be established in the school.

Mackillop College has a procedure document for crisis care which outlines the following:

- immediate response roles
- external contact persons for specific emergencies
- responsibilities for managing and informing staff, students, parents
- responsibility for handling the media
- counselling support for stressed and anguished persons
- designated recovery and withdrawal areas if required
- longer term follow-up support for persons affected by the incident
- long-term monitoring of those most affected when they return to school/work
- debriefing procedures for the crisis team and others involved in managing the incident
- reporting and recording the incident and evaluating the effectiveness of the program.

Grief management

Critical incidents can cause considerable grief to members of the school community, and schools can find themselves confronted with the need to deal with some very emotional reactions as the impact of the incident is felt. The school's response to a critical incident involving its staff or students requires delicate handling to minimise the trauma.

For example, in the case of a suicide of a student or staff member, inappropriate glamorisation of the person or his or her action can raise the potential for another suicide to occur. For this reason, it is important to avoid emphasising the strengths of the person who committed suicide, and it is better to reinforce that the person must have been very troubled, rather than indicate that the person's action has deeply saddened, hurt or frustrated others.

Following a death or a life threatening incident, different people experience grief in different ways. A new trauma can re-awaken grief associated with a previous loss, or it can bring unresolved tensions into focus.

School counselling services

The provision of support and counselling will often be required, both in response to critical incidents and other personal crises, as well as in day-to-day matters.

Counselling is best given by those professionally trained to do so. Teachers should be wary of assuming this role, and may need to refer students and other staff to suitably qualified specialists or to an appropriate counselling service outside the school.

Implementation

Principal's commitment

The principal, within the scope of his authority, will be responsible for ensuring that:

- appropriate staff are available to carry out the objectives of this policy
- resources and facilities are available to ensure the objectives of this policy are able to be carried out with integrity.
- staff are aware of any mandatory requirements for reporting student information
- appropriately qualified staff are available for staff and students to receive guidance and counselling on personal, professional and academic matters
- specialist staff are provided with appropriate resources and facilities to enable them to offer quality confidential support to students and staff
- specialist staff are provided with the opportunity and encouraged to maintain and upgrade their professional standards
- all staff are informed about how to recognise students or staff members in crisis or trouble and know where to refer them for appropriate support

Staff commitment

Staff are responsible for being supportive of and cooperating with specialist staff responsible for carrying out the objectives of this policy.

Review Date

This Policy will be reviewed in: January 2009

Signature

Rory Kennedy
(Principal)

Date: _____