



Responding to a Traumatic Incident

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

This checklist will help you to respond to an emergency or traumatic incident. Not all situations will follow the checklist in order.



The first immediate steps are given below.

STEP 1 - Gather the facts:

STEP 2 - Respond to people who are injured on and or off site

STEP 3 - ECE manager/principal convene the emergency response team

STEP 4 - Immediate actions, share key facts and plan initial responses

STEP 5 - Inform your community

STEP 6 - Prepare for the media

STEP 7 - Respond to the media

STEP 8 - Support staff, children and young people, parents and the community

STEP 9 - Evaluate your plan, procedures and practice



STEP 1 - Gather the facts:

- › listen to what has happened
- › record the caller's name and phone number
- › record the names of others involved
- › record and verify the facts of the event
- › ascertain the reactions of those involved and record any actions taken
- › check that the appropriate emergency services have been contacted
- › check NZQA code staff contacted 0800 697296 if incident involves an international student
- › inform the caller of any actions you will take (such as informing the head teacher/manager/principal)
- › give the caller a staff member's name and phone number in case they need to call back
- › immediately after the call, contact the ECE manager/principal.

STEP 2 - Respond to people who are injured:

- › participate in and manage medical triage onsite with other trained first aiders and medical staff
- › establish communication/liaison links with medical staff
- › if event has occurred away from the school site, establish an incident response team to attend the site and to liaise with the onsite incident team
- › ensure immediate medical intervention in life threatening situations
- › ensure patients are prioritised for treatment in line with the severity of their medical condition
- › keep accurate records of injured staff and children and young people, doctors and hospitals involved
- › Medical staff will communicate medical conditions and notify next of kin, only release information in consultation with medical staff and police
- › minimise student exposure to the injury scene with the use of screens/removal etc
- › manage parent arrivals onsite and off-site and the release of children and young people through agreed systems
- › clean site (in culturally appropriate ways).

STEP 3 - ECE manager/principal convene the emergency response team

- › inform the management committee or board of trustees to determine the need to assemble the ECE service/school emergency response team
- › contact ECE service/ response team members (leadership team) to coordinate support
- › set a meeting time and place to assemble
- › establish a communication line with emergency services
- › locate the master key, floor plan, teacher contact list/lists of children and young people and contacts, where relevant
- › locate critical incident contact list for death, serious harm, illness of international student.
<https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/Tertiary/The-Code/Critical-incident-contact-list-death-of-a-learner.pdf>
- › contact the Ministry of Education Traumatic Incident Service for support 0800 848 326 (0800 TI Team)
- › provide the traumatic incident service with a meeting time and place, where necessary.

STEP 4 - Follow your emergency plan, key tasks and information sharing

- › convene an on-site response team
- › share facts and assess the impact of the crisis/emergency (when did the event occur? where did the event occur? how did it happen? are members of the response team involved? do any staff members need to be assigned roles?)
- › assign response team roles
- › identify any religious or cultural considerations and if interpreters are required
- › determine how many children, young people and staff are likely to be affected and potential responses that might follow
- › determine if the ECE service/school can remain open, e.g. are there enough staff? is the site a crime scene?
- › determine if additional relief staff are needed
- › assign phones for media, public, information and outside calls
- › clear access to driveways to allow access for emergency response vehicles
- › liaise with transport operators (passenger lists, route descriptions)
- › determine what, if any, information can be released via police.
- › Identify (if needed) parent access sites or rooms
- › Set up a central information board to keep staff informed
- › Put information on the board about media spokesperson, media times and place, student support centre, family liaison).

STEP 5 - Inform and support your community:

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

STEP 6 - prepare for the media:

- › designate a media spokesperson (usually the service manager or principal) and confirm that no one else talks
- › ensure sufficient staff and phones are available to handle incoming media and public calls
- › log all calls, where possible
- › transfer calls to appropriate team members and staff, ie the identified media spokesperson
- › ensure all administration staff and teachers are briefed on all aspects of information flow
- › develop a media response in liaison with management/the board (keeping in mind confidentiality, family/whānau wishes, information available to be released and the need to check with police and emergency services)
- › determine how and what information can be released to the community (eg, using recorded phone messages and staff statements)
- › liaise with others to check whether the content of all messages is culturally appropriate
- › maintain a media contact list
- › control times and places of media arrival and remind media of the effect of media coverage on children and young people – especially where an incident involves suicide
- › locate the mobile communication kit and check contents
- › draft letters to be sent home, include facts, summaries, information about likely reactions and support networks.

STEP 7 - respond to the media:

- › say to reporters that you will call them back, then take the time to prepare your single overriding communications objective (eg, the one thing you want your audience to remember)
- › ask the reporter for their name, organisation, contact details, general nature of the inquiry and who else they have spoken to
- › talk only about your area of knowledge/expertise
- › distinguish fact from opinion
- › answer the questions firmly and directly
- › keep to the issue and use key messages
- › use plain language and avoid slang, jargon or waffle
- › don't make personal comments
- › don't criticise other people or organisations
- › don't speculate
- › don't say, 'no comment', instead, if you don't know the answer, say so
- › don't look at or into the camera, instead talk to the interviewer, focusing at head level.

STEP 8 - support staff, children and young people, parents and the community:

- › prepare written material for the ECE service/school community to support their understanding of the event and communication with children and young people
- › have teachers share prepared factual material with children and young people
- › allow children and young people to express thoughts and feelings regarding an incident
- › clarify misinformation
- › encourage teachers to normalise children and young people's feelings and provide factual answers to questions
- › encourage helping relationships, characterised by empathy, warmth and genuineness in the classroom
- › take care not to lecture and to allow periods of silence for children and young people
- › avoid clichés such as 'be strong' and 'you are doing so well', understanding they reinforce a student's sense of aloneness
- › be aware of cultural differences that exist in expressions of grief
- › maintain confidentiality, where appropriate
- › provide snacks, drinks to children, young people and staff and support to staff, as appropriate
- › visit selected classrooms to provide opportunities for discussion and support
- › have systems in place for staff and parents to share any concerns they have about children and young people

- › monitor and follow-up on classroom and school attendance closely
- › monitor staff attendance closely
- › support referrals for immediate outside support, where needed
- › provide contact numbers for parents to ring after hours
- › document actions taken
- › consider setting up an open forum for people to express concerns about the well-being of children and young people
- › provide teachers, families/whānau and the community with information on supporting children and young people and where and how to seek additional support.

Step nine - evaluate your plan, procedures and practice:

- › meet to evaluate your plan, procedures and practice within two to three weeks of a traumatic incident
- › look at ways to improve the plan and procedures, eg, by upskilling staff
- › identify and follow up outstanding tasks and identify and address any concerns
- › identify any ongoing support needs of staff, children and young people
- › discuss the need for letters of appreciation (for people who helped) and/or any remembrance activities.