

School Readiness and Contingency Planning

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Aims

The twin aims of Section 4 are: “to describe the elements of the contingency planning process” and “to describe school factors which contribute to effective contingency planning”.

OHP 1

This topic could follow on naturally from Section 2, *The Nature and Incidence of Critical Events in Schools*.

If it is delivered on its own, there would require to be some re-capping of the content of the above section, and reference at least to **Section 2 OHPs 6 and 7**.

There are **two factors** in school readiness. One has to do with straightforward planning of the mechanisms and systems to be put in place in the event of an incident. The other concerns the school's management and organisational ethos, which will greatly influence its ability to respond effectively in such an event. We will look firstly at the contingency planning process, then at school factors.

OHP 2

The Contingency Planning Process

Prerequisites

The use of school **crisis management groups** is highlighted in most of the major texts, eg Yule and Gold (1993), and it is emphasised that these groups be established in

preparation for such events, not after the fact. Stirling Council Guidelines, for example, suggest that such a core group ideally comprises two teachers, two students, head teacher, school psychologist, a parent, a clerical support worker and a support for learning assistant. It is recommended that small schools form a group within a cluster. It is notable that the school psychologist is included in the core group. There is a growing expectation that educational psychologists will have the skills and expertise both to advise the group on matters relating to Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), and to offer hands-on support to the school in the event of such an incident. CISM is described in detail within the main PDP report.

It has to be recognised that on the day of any critical event one or more of a crisis management group may not be available. Substitute personnel should always be considered, and involved in planning and rehearsing.

It is well known that crises are better handled when there is a division of labour among members of the crisis management team.

Task1: In groups of three, ask the participants to brainstorm a list of appropriate roles for a crisis management team. Receive verbal feedback.

In a school situation, common roles and tasks assigned are those of resource manager, care of staff, care of children, contact with parents and handling the media. A liaison role with the emergency services is also crucial, but will vary depending on the nature of the crisis. Finally, there is a need for someone to hold a 'maintenance' role, i.e. to ensure that whatever aspects of normal school functioning are possible, continue to happen. After an incident the need to re-establish school routines is important for many children.

Availability of information

An essential element in managing a crisis is the availability of reliable information. Whilst the most difficult aspect of this is information about the impact of the event itself, the situation can be helped massively by having accurate school information - up to date class lists; registers and timetables; up to date home addresses and contact numbers; and up to date contact lists for the emergency services, education management, and

other relevant Council services. Because an incident might impede access to any particular part of a school, duplicate lists should be held in different, prominent locations around a school and copies also held at education headquarters.

OHP 3

Task 2: Ask participants to consider, in groups of three, this particular list. Would their own contexts throw up any different names or contacts? Receive verbal feedback.

Identifying potential critical incidents

In order to be able to respond effectively and almost automatically to an incident, core groups should make a point of rehearsing situations which might conceivably happen within their locality. Members of the team, or an outside consultant, should design scenarios which the group can use as exercises, working through the steps outlined by Yule and Gold in their paper *Wise before the Event* (Yule and Gold 1993). The group should then reflect on their response and work on improving their methods, identifying any gaps or shortfalls. Such a simulation exercise would include devising a plan of intervention, assigning roles, and deciding on the scale of response based upon the available information. This process should be repeated at regular intervals, and especially when membership of the core team changes.

Staff training and awareness raising

Responses to critical events in schools are at their most effective if all members of the school, including pupils, are aware of the crisis management planning process and know their likely part in that process. The core team should communicate to all members of staff, especially including ancillary and part-time staff, the essence of the contingency plan. Staff seminars should be held where information can be given to all members, and their active participation sought. Any suggestions or comments made by staff should be considered in reviewing the plan. The core group should devise a concise set of instructions relating to the plan and copies of this should be available to all members of the school community.

Involving pupils

It is important that pupils also are aware of the crisis management planning process and know their likely part in that process. Ideally pupils should be represented in planning groups, and the emerging Contingency Plan discussed in pupil forums. This will ensure a more coherent response in the event of an incident.

Involving the community

Schools should share their crisis management plans with all parents, and with school boards and parent-teacher associations. Parent groups may be represented on the core group and parent volunteers may be crucial in the event of an incident affecting the school.

Some schools have close contact with clergy and other community leaders, who could again play a vital part in helping to manage a crisis.

For psychologists working with schools on critical incidents, a key staff development task would be to encourage the schools to adopt an *active* stance in devising a crisis management plan rather than absorbing this information in a passive way. The most effective means of doing this is to offer staff development over two sessions with a gap of some weeks between, so that the second session can be used to look supportively at plans devised by schools. This kind of participation should be a precondition of attendance.

Task 3 (See Task Handout) Dealing with Critical Incidents

Ask participants in groups of three, to consider one or more of three scenarios and consider (a) whether the Crisis Management team should be involved, (b) which roles might be required, (c) which other agencies need to be notified, and (d) what the scope of this incident is likely to be.

School Readiness: Management, Organisation, Ethos, Curriculum

It is often the case that schools find it hard to acknowledge children's suffering after a traumatic event. It is felt to be more important to be seen to be getting on with the business of teaching and learning, and the temptation to play down the emotional repercussions is high. Yet many researchers point out that the school can be a major source of healing and rehabilitation for children who have suffered loss or trauma (Pynoos and Nader 1988, Capewell 1994).

OHP 4

The aim of this subsection is to emphasise the positive influence schools can have on the wellbeing of children who have experienced traumatic events, and to build this awareness into all aspects of Contingency Planning.

The description usually given to the management consideration of these issues is called **Care Leadership**. When staff and pupils are managed in such a way that expression of emotion is dismissed or played down, particularly when members of the school are experiencing emotional upset, Care Leadership is not being exercised. The acknowledgement of such feelings must be signalled from the top down; the symbolic nature of the head teacher's involvement gives the lead to management staff, teaching staff, ancillary staff and pupils.

School is a large part of young people's lives, and models of how to cope and how to deal with difficult situations can be included in the ongoing experience of young people. A great deal of learning in schools occurs through *demonstration* - students learn through observation of adults' behaviour and style of operating. An environment such as a family or a school (and the people therein) can disempower by accident as well as by design. It is useless for staff or parents to stress verbally the importance of cooperation, forgiveness, kindness, honesty, openness, non-aggression, if these qualities are not visible in relationships with other adults and embodied in adult-child contact. How school staff relate, communicate and function collectively ought to involve the practice of any skills they would wish to develop in their pupils. Teaching life skills, for example, is therefore not restricted to the preparation of particular lessons but involves teachers undertaking their own personal development and skills acquisition of the competencies they wish to teach. Teaching pupils to challenge; to ask how and why

things are how they are; never to take for granted; always to look for alternatives and better ways of doing things is equipping them to learn from any situation. Owning their own opinions, ideas and experience is likely to be more significant than reciting other people's answers.

As well as Care Leadership, effective head teachers should be able to demonstrate two other related qualities, namely Motivational Leadership and Informational Leadership (Dyregrov 1998). The head teacher's role in setting this tone in the school is an important contributory factor to school readiness. Similarly, the way in which the head teacher sets up and supports the Contingency Planning initiatives is crucial. A head teacher who gives priority to Contingency Planning, including regular updating of information and awareness raising of all staff, is fulfilling these roles. Recognition of those members of staff who can perform effectively in the event of a crisis is a vital quality. Also, those head teachers who already have strong working relationships with external agencies are in a better position to use these effectively should the occasion arise.

Informational Leadership can be demonstrated by the way the head teacher ensures the distribution and high profile of the Contingency Plan, the updating of information on a regular basis, and guides the process through which all staff and pupils are properly trained. Information also includes the kinds of psychoeducational material developed by Education Services and schools in anticipation of critical incidents. If leaflets of a general nature are already available, these can quickly be distributed or customized in the event (**see, for example, the sample leaflets provided in the PDP main report, which can be customised**).

A major factor, which can influence the potential of schools to deal effectively with crises, is the curriculum. Curricular approaches that permit children to express their feelings and to raise issues of importance to them are an excellent vehicle for ongoing support if an incident does occur. The Circle Time approach (Moseley 1993,1996; Bliss et al 1995), variants of which are now fairly common at least in Scottish primary school classrooms, provide opportunities for children to raise genuine concerns and can be used flexibly to explore the impact of traumatic events, large and small, in the lives of children. Teachers require to be trained to respond supportively when 'hard things'

come to the surface, and not to let their own anxieties close down the topics raised in this way. Materials are now available to support the use of Circle Time in secondary schools also. A wealth of material is now available following the publication of the Social Competence project (1998) for use in all schools.

Much of the literature stresses the need for concepts such as death, loss and bereavement to find a place in normal classroom discussion, so that children learn to appreciate the normality of these concepts. Clearly, discussions about death need to reflect children's level of development, but there are intellectually honest ways of demystifying these concepts, giving children a familiarity with them and language to describe them accurately (eg Smith and Pennells 1996, Wagner 1993). Bill Yule makes the point that if the concept of death has not arisen and been discussed in this non-threatening way beforehand, the difficulties of dealing with death and bereavement in the event of an incident are much exacerbated.

One subgroup of the PDP working group on Critical Events has collated lists of suitable materials for whole-class work, for small group work and for working with individuals. **See the PDP main report.** School readiness means addressing these curricular issues in *normal* contexts, so that when an abnormal situation arises the concepts are more familiar and less threatening or overwhelming.

Task 4: Ask participants to discuss, in groups of three, the following questions:

- **How well does your present institution fit with the concepts of Care Leadership and Listening Ethos described above?**
- **How easy would it be to introduce curricular issues concerning, for example, death and bereavement in your current setting?**

School Readiness and Contingency Planning

References

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**SCHOOL READINESS AND CONTINGENCY
PLANNING**

AIMS:

To describe the elements of the contingency planning process

To describe school factors which contribute to effective contingency planning

CONTINGENCY PLANNING

PREREQUISITES

SCHOOL CRISIS MANAGEMENT GROUP

- **PERSONNEL**
- **SUBSTITUTES**
- **LIKELY ROLES**

CONTACT LIST

- **COMPREHENSIVE**
- **KEPT UP TO DATE**
- **KEPT IN PROMINENT LOCATIONS**

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL CRITICAL INCIDENTS

SIMULATION - PLAN OF INTERVENTION

GATHER INFORMATION

ASSIGN ROLES

DECIDE ON SCALE OF RESPONSE

DECIDE ON WHICH AGENCIES TO INVOLVE

ARRANGE A STAFF SEMINAR TO DISCUSS THE PLAN

REMEMBER TO INVOLVE ANCILLARY STAFF

REVIEW IN LIGHT OF STAFF RESPONSES

MAKE AVAILABLE TO ALL NEW MEMBERS OF STAFF

DECIDE ON STAFF TRAINING REQUIRED

DEVISE 'CONCISE SET OF INSTRUCTIONS'

INVOLVE PUPILS IN THE PROCESS

INVOLVE PARENTS AND COMMUNITY CONTACTS

CONTINGENCY PLANNING - CONTACT NUMBERS

CONTACT	NAME	PHONE No.
Director of Education		
Chair of School Board		
Police		
Fire Brigade		
Social Work Services		
School Doctor		
GP Practices		
School Nurse		
Health Visitors		
Educational Psychologist		
Hospitals		
Counselling Services		
Local Religious groups: Minister Priest School Chaplain		
Staffing (supply staff)		
Other Voluntary Agencies		
Council Press Officer		
Other Emergency Numbers eg Emergency Response Team		
This list was updated on	/ /	
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'We were surprised at the failure of teachers to note the problems children were experiencing at school. In part, this must be because they did not wish to acknowledge the horrors the children experienced and did not know how to respond to the needs. Similar reactions happened after the Bradford fire disaster when many schools refused to acknowledge that those who had been at the stadium but were not burned might have any psychological aftereffects. McFarlane in Australia was thwarted in his attempts to study the children who saw the bush fires because schools would not cooperate saying it was best to let past things remain in the past'

Yule and Williams (1988)

Task 1: In groups of three, ask the participants to brainstorm a list of appropriate roles for a crisis management team.

Receive verbal feedback

Task 2: In groups of three, ask participants to consider this particular list (OHP 3). Would their own contexts throw up any different names or contacts? Receive verbal feedback.

Task 3: Dealing with Critical Incidents

Look at the three scenarios and consider (a) whether the Crisis Management team should be involved, (b) which roles might be required, (c) which other agencies need to be notified and (d) what the scope of this incident is likely to be.

- 1 Part of the school building has collapsed, killing one child and injuring others. Two children are still trapped under the debris.**

- 2 A 17 year old girl pupil has been abducted on her way home from school. Three other children witnessed the abduction. The police have found no trace of the abductors or the girl.**

- 3 The school received a phone call from the police to say that two men have been killed in a road traffic accident. The men have a total of five children at the school. There are also a number of cousins. The two mothers have been informed, and are on their way to the school.**

Task 4: Ask participants to discuss, in groups of three, the following questions:

- **How well does your present institution fit with the concepts of Care Leadership and Listening Ethos described here?**
- **How easy would it be to introduce curricular issues concerning, for example, death and bereavement in your current setting?**