



Shrewsbury School

## SHREWSBURY SCHOOL CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

### Policy Document

#### **Introduction**

Handling a crisis is more or less a normal part of school life, but some incidents are significantly more critical or overwhelming in character than others. Boys, parents, staff (teaching and non-teaching) may experience acute - even prolonged - trauma or distress. Experience at Shrewsbury and elsewhere suggests that a great deal can be done to help staff and pupils cope in a crisis and, conversely, failure to act properly can prolong stress and suffering, delay recovery, seriously affect academic progress and affect the general well-being of the entire School community.

#### **Definitions**

A *critical incident* is real and horrific: it can be 'a single incident or sequence of incidents which are sudden and unexpected, contain real or imagined threats to a person, overwhelm usual coping mechanisms, cause severe disruption and are traumatic to anyone' (The Head's Legal Guide No 28 April 1993.)

*Critical Incident management* is the management of a critical event and the individuals, groups and school community affected by its aftermath.

#### **Impact**

Several issues may arise when a Critical Incident occurs:

- Pupil response – anxiety, worry, stress, post traumatic stress disorder, bereavement issues, behavioural effects, impact on educational attainment
- Staff response – much as above but professional performance may also be affected
- Parent response – parents will need accurate information very quickly
- Governing Body response
- Communication issues – technical or human (jammed phone lines etc.)
- Site and security issues – the media can descend in force and need to be accommodated
- Media Issues – understanding their needs is critical to the eventual outcome
- Policy/decision-making issues – not easy in times of stress

- Stress on incident managers (who are not immune from emotional responses) – experience suggests this can be one of the biggest challenges
- The need for the school to function as normally as possible – again experience here and elsewhere suggests that a prompt return to routine an important priority.

**N.B. When a critical incident occurs, all of these issues can arise in a very short space of time (within hours) and place huge burdens on those handling the situation.**

### **Objectives**

The act of formulating a plan can ‘reduce the danger to schools by devising routines and procedures that aim to prevent disasters from happening in the first place’ (Croner’s Head Teacher’s Bulletin Sept.96). Risk Assessment is a part of this process, but a proper plan can also reduce the amount of decision-making that has to be made in potentially very difficult circumstances. A Critical Incident plan can be very effective if it is delivered promptly to all affected in a pro-active way.

Lastly, a plan can assist staff (and therefore also the boys, parents etc.) in coping with disasters if and when such tragic incidents occur.

### **The aim**

An oft quoted aim is to replicate the security of knowledge achieved by the operation of a fire practice. That is a system that is:

- Well known
- Rehearsed
- Effective

No hard and fast rules can be made – but a flexible structure needs to be in place that is NOT dependent on any particular person or persons.

### **The Critical Incident Management Plan**

The plan itself falls into three sections:

- Preparation – being wise before the event
- Coping with an incident
- Handling the medium and longer term effects on those affected

## Section I Preparation – being wise before the event

### Risk Assessment

The process of undertaking Risk Assessment plays a fundamental part of dealing with critical incidents by virtue of the fact that risks are considered in advance and steps are taken to minimize those risks. It is School policy that we undertake Risk Assessment at all levels in the School both on the teaching side and on the non-teaching side. Such risk assessments, be they in relation to on-site or off-site issues, and be they generic or specific to a single outing or event, are an essential element in reducing the possibility of disaster. The process of preparing Risk Assessments at Shrewsbury School is increasingly well developed. The Health and Safety Policy, implemented by the Health and Safety Committee, aims to develop a robust culture of Risk Assessment at all levels throughout the school.

Risk assessments should not only consider specific risks, and how they can be avoided or mitigated, but there must also be consideration of what is to be done in the case of emergency.

For all off site trips, the Senior Master is the designated **Educational Visits Co-ordinator**.

It is tempting to believe that the only possibility of an emergency or critical incident is on an off-site trip, but again our own experience shows that this is not the case. Other risks that we should prepare for include –

- Business continuity planning (records, files and documents of all sorts)
- IT resources and back up systems including fire proof record keeping
- Major loss of infrastructure – e.g. Catering (fire in KH Kitchens), Loss of a boarding house, loss of a major teaching area, loss of essential utilities (electricity, water, gas etc.)
- Reputation and financial risks
- Major external threats – bomb scares, terrorist attack etc
- Infectious Diseases (e.g. meningitis) or food poisoning
- Allegation of serious abuse against a member of staff

Case Studies will be examined in the regular Critical Incident Management Meetings and appropriate information and training disseminated to all relevant parties.

### **Staff Training**

In order for the plan not to be 'person dependent' it should be ensured that various members of the Critical Incident Management Team:

- Are trained in handling the media
- Are trained in critical incident management
- Continue to promote and develop listening and support skills in a number of staff
- Maintain close links with experienced counsellors outside the School

It will be important that the various roles are well understood: the members of the Critical Incident Management Team will need to understand the plan, their respective roles and each others' roles: this will require occasional but regular in-service training.

The Delegation of Responsibility model addresses this need in conjunction with the analysis of Case Studies that forms an integral part of the regular Critical Incident Management meetings.

## Regular Updates to this plan

This Critical Incident Management Plan (including all contact details) should be updated by the Second Master on a regular basis.

## Section 2 Action in the Immediate aftermath

### Chain of Command

The need for a chain of command exists over and above the need for a Critical Incident Management Plan, and must apply to the Teaching staff and the Bursarial/works side. In the case of an emergency, the person in command may be called upon to initiate the management of a critical incident. Thus the chain of command needs to be known and understood by all those likely to be called upon to be in command, and all members of staff must know its existence. Equally, the training programme should build in the appointment of trained deputies for the Critical Incident managers who may be away from school or actively involved in the incident itself.

In term time, the normal chain of command is clear. However there is a need for a clear chain of command to be established for each holiday period, and this is the responsibility of the Senior Master specifically looking at the possibility of dealing with a critical incident in the absence of the Headmaster.

| Teaching Side                              | Bursarial Side |
|--|----------------|
| Headmaster                                 | Bursar         |
| Senior Master                              |                |
| Second Master                              | Works Bursar   |
| Director of Studies                        |                |
| Director of Training and Staff Development |                |
| Chaplain                                   |                |
| RNRJ                                       |                |

### Critical Incident Management Team

The Critical Incident Management Team will consist of the following members:

| Critical Management Team                   | Incident | Additional provided from               | Support as needed            |
|--|----------|--|------------------------------|
| Headmaster                                 |          | Works Bursar                           | IT staff and Website manager |
| Bursar                                     |          | School Doctor and the Sanatorium staff | Works Bursar's Secretary     |
| Senior Master                              |          | Listening Team Leader                  |                              |
| Second Master                              |          | Head Groundsman                        |                              |
| Director of Studies                        |          | Head Caretaker                         |                              |
| Director of Training and Staff Development |          | Key Maintenance Personnel              |                              |
| Chaplain                                   |          | Headmaster's Secretary                 |                              |

|      |                           |  |
|------|---------------------------|--|
| RNRJ | Second Master's Secretary |  |
| MT   | School Receptionist       |  |

The role of the Critical Incident Management Team is to:

- co-ordinate all necessary action,
- To control and organize all communication,
- To co-ordinate necessary responses and support for those directly or indirectly involved.

It is likely that in an emergency situation this team will be under considerable pressure and stress. If priorities are established, and roles are defined in advance, then some of these pressures can be reduced.

See Appendix B : Delegation of Responsibility Flow Chart and Briefing Papers

### **The role of the Headmaster**

In any major incident the Headmaster is likely to be under considerable pressure to be the voice of the school: there is no avoiding this. However the Headmaster will also have to be free to think and to develop plans and policy. These pressures are in addition to the personal emotional pressures all staff will be under in an emergency. It will therefore be important that as much pressure is taken from the Headmaster's shoulders as possible: this can only be done by effective delegation which is achieved by planning and all understanding the roles that will be filled (for example if the common room know in advance that in the event of an emergency that it will not be the Headmaster who briefs, then further questions and pressures can be avoided.)

### **Critical Incident Pack**

All contact details (inc. ex. directory numbers etc) for all of the above to be kept in key locations for immediate access and use. This plan and all associated contact details will be contained in a pack held at:

- Headmaster's Office & Home
- Bursar's Office & Home
- Senior Master's Office and Home
- Second Master's Office and Home

The pack will contain:

- This plan
- Appendix A: Confidential contact information for senior staff and school services)
- Appendix B: Delegation of Responsibility Model
- The School Directory (produced termly by the Second Master's Secretary)
- Phone List (MJT)
- Most recent brown Book (MJT)
- Full School Database (MW)

### **Support from External agencies**

Shropshire County Council Emergency Planning Unit:

The School has established a formal link with the Shropshire County Council Emergency Planning Unit (currently headed by Ms Nikki Eggington). Considerable expertise and support is available from the County Emergency Planning Unit who can be contacted in emergency by ringing the Fire Control room on 260290 and asking for the **Emergency Planning Duty Officer**.

SCC Emergency Planning team have a database of companies who can provide materials and support at immediate notice.

### **Physical Base & Infrastructure support**

The Headmaster's study may in some cases be too public and may have to be used for important meetings with staff or parents.

The Senior Master's office provides a better location with added privacy and less likely to disrupt the normal running of the School.

### **Communications**

#### Infrastructure

It will be vital that such the Critical Incident Management Centre has the ability to communicate by telephone and electronically. There are two network points in each of the Senior Master's Office, Second Master's office and in the Director of Studies' Office. Aware that the School telephone system could easily be log-jammed by incoming calls, all members of the Critical Incident Management Team have mobile phones and in the event of a critical incident contact would be maintained between key parties using this medium.

#### Coping with the effects of rapid spread of news

In an age of mass communication through mobile phones, the internet, even local radio, it is possible that in the event of an incident, news will spread within minutes of its occurrence. Experience, even at Shrewsbury, suggests that parents can get hold of information about a problem before the School is aware of it.

If the School is to be seen to handle emergency situations well, then we must be able to respond quickly but properly.

Excessive delays can lead to rumour, which in turn creates possible distress and problems over and above those directly related to the incident (e.g. parents, even of those not involved, clamouring - quite reasonably - for information.)

#### Speed and Accuracy of Information

In the case of an incident it is imperative that the School tries to establish the facts – who is involved for example. This is not always as easy as it might seem however, especially as staff are involved as well as pupils in an incident abroad for example. Therefore it must be understood by all staff (teaching and non-teaching) that rapid communication with the Critical Incident Management Team is imperative. Equally, it is the Second Master's responsibility to ensure that all staff understand this procedure and know how to make such contact.

#### Rapid Communication

In the event of an emergency it will be essential to communicate very quickly with several groups of people.

Where the group is large (e.g. boys, parents etc.) a cascade system is the most efficient. All Houses will have a House List with contact numbers for parents. House Tutors will be summoned in the first instance by the Housemaster and will be responsible for contacting the parents of their tutees. Sixth Formers will be contacted by House staff as decided by the Housemaster.

| Groups to be Contacted | Procedure  |
|------------------------|--|
| Boys                   | House emergency assemblies as in normal procedures   |
| Staff - teaching       | Cascade via Heads of Faculty to all teaching staff (inc. part time)  |
| Staff – non-teaching   | JAH and team in line with Bursarial procedures<br>Housemasters to contact house domestic staff   |
| Parents                | Cascade by phone via House-based lists used by tutor teams<br>By email. This is now the standard method of communication. The School database has all email addresses of parents and guardians – with a few exceptions (c.10) who need to be contacted by letter. However pre-addressed envelopes for the entire school are also held in the Headmaster’s office at all times. Post can be taken directly to the sorting office, even on a Sunday. |
| Governors              | From Headmaster’s office by phone/email/fax/letter   |

Accurate Communication

If the process of disseminating information quickly is important, then the accuracy of that information is even more important.

Accuracy of Lists for off site trips.

It goes without saying that lists and documentation left at School for all visits must be accurate to the last person – there is nothing worse than assuming someone is on a trip or in a vehicle when they are not, and vice-versa.

Speaking with one voice

Just as accurate information is essential, due care must be taken with sensitive information relating to injuries or people affected until we are sure that next of kin have been informed.

Also different messages or a different ‘spin’ on the same message can have a devastating effect and undermine the credibility of further information and trust in those providing it.

Good practice suggests that prepared statements should be used (see media section below) and that clear, written, advice from the Critical Incident Management Team, should be provided to those responsible for disseminating information within the School.

**Media Management**

Although some experts believe that the Headmaster should be protected from the media, it is likely that our parents and possibly even the staff would expect to see the Headmaster fronting any media interest. This should be kept under review however depending on other demands on the Headmaster (e.g. the need to see parents or make crucial decisions.) Many others will be working behind the scenes.

It will be vitally important to control the news as far as possible. The task of dealing with the media has been delegated to the Senior Master, working in liaison with the School's Communications department. It is particularly important for all concerned to stick to agreed policy on divulging information or making public comment, even in the face of difficult and persistent questions. Proper handling of the media can turn potentially adverse publicity to our advantage.

#### Media base

Part of the management of the media should include a location where they can be based, this will include a room where briefings can take place: experience elsewhere suggests that this should be on the site but out of the way. The Maidment Building would seem to be an ideal location, with the Squash Court car park and access road being made available for any media vehicles. Provision of a fixed media base should make it easier to prevent intrusive media presence elsewhere on the site. This is an aspect of security that will probably need attention.

#### Security

It is likely that security could be a major issue whilst a critical incident unfolds (the incident may of course be security related in the first place).

The Works Bursar is responsible for providing security cover via the caretakers, external security firms (currently GSD) and the maintenance team but action may have to be prompt. In emergency circumstances the security needs to be good but low profile, and needs to let the right people in. Media intrusion has in the past been an issue (see above) and will have to be monitored. Photographers snooping around and random cold calling to school numbers is likely to take place.

### **Section 3** **Handling the Medium and Long Term effects**

It is difficult to predict the medium and long term effects of a critical incident and much will depend on the nature of the event itself. Advice received and acted on at Shrewsbury showed the enormous benefit having some experienced and trained staff around. The House structure and the closeness of the relationship between Housemaster, pupils and parents is a real source of strength, but it can also be a weakness. Housemasters (or any other member of staff for that matter) are no more immune to personal feelings than anyone else. The adage 'who cares for the carers' should be taken seriously after the first few hours. The following areas will need to be carefully considered.

#### Managing the Staff

All staff, both teaching and bursarial, will need an opportunity to express their emotional reactions to the crisis and support should be arranged. Research suggests that as far as possible this support should come from within the school itself. SMT will need to protect some colleagues from over-working while at the same time following their own advice! Tired and upset staff, at any level, do not make sensible decisions.

#### Use of Outside Professionals

Again, depending upon the nature of the incident, the following may well be important.

- Shropshire County Council
- Psychologists and Psychiatrists
- Social Workers
- Counsellors
- Police

### Encouraging Pupils to talk

After a disaster pupils as well as staff may feel an enormous pressure to talk about their experiences. After a few days this can become irritating for those young people who were not involved. In the immediate term adults should listen and make themselves available. After this pupils should be encouraged to talk to a designated member of staff perhaps the Housemaster, Tutor or member of the Listening Team. The pupils themselves must always be consulted in this process. Many pupils will talk informally with peers, friends or older boys. Staff and pupils alike need to be aware that in doing so people may well become upset, but equally that such distress can be healing. The strong House system here at Shrewsbury, would undoubtedly play a crucial role after any major crisis.

### Monitoring Pupils

Many of the most distressing effects of major traumas are subjective and internal. Therefore there is no simple and straightforward way of monitoring how pupils are coping in the aftermath of a crisis. Teachers should be encouraged to keep an eye on pupil behaviour around the site and in the classroom, their levels of concentration and the overall quality of their work.

### Memorial services

In the extreme case of a fatality, the current consensus among mental health experts is that the majority of children (and adults) come to terms with grief more quickly if they say farewell formally. In addition to funerals, SMT, in conjunction with the chaplain should liaise with the school community in planning any memorial service in the chapel. The needs of those closest to the deceased are of paramount importance and where possible they should be included in the planning of such an event. Families must be kept informed and in most cases this task would fall to the Housemaster.