

# HIGHVIEW COLLEGE CRISIS POLICY

**Responsible – Executive OPERATIONAL**

(Ratified every three years)



|              |                            |                  |
|--------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| Developed by | Principal, Julie Baud      | 2012             |
| Updated by   | Principal, Melinda Scash   | 2016 / 2018      |
| Reviewed by  | Collins, Biggers & Paisley | 26 January 2019  |
| Ratified by  | The Highview College Board | 18 February 2020 |
|              |                            | 2023             |
|              |                            | 2026             |

## 1. Rationale

The Highview College Crisis Incident Management and Response Policy and Procedure provides the overarching policy framework and procedure intended to guide Highview College (**Highview**) staff in appropriately managing and responding to serious incidents.

Incidents must be appropriately managed in a way that prevents them from happening as far as possible; has the right plans in place for when they do; has the right people and resources in place to respond and recover; then has action plans for management to absorb key learnings and reduce the chance of future occurrences.

This policy and procedure is intended to guide staff in responding to a crisis. A crisis can affect the Highview school community in an ongoing manner and/or for a limited period of time. These procedures are intended to be time limited, problem-focused interventions designed to identify and resolve the crisis, restore equilibrium, and support productive responses.

Although compliance with compliance response procedures is expected by staff, ensuring the safety of students and others involved in any incident is paramount at all times.

## 2. Aims

Highview aims to establish a safe environment and take appropriate action in response to incidents which affect, or have the potential to affect, the health, safety or well-being of students, families, staff, and other stakeholders, in addition to Highview assets and operations.

The Response Pack provides guidance to direct staff through managing serious incidents, but does not provide step-by-step response plans to resolve every scenario. The response strategy, length of time required and speed of the process will reflect the specific context, scale and timing of the incident.

The purpose of this procedure document is to provide criteria to assist in:

- The evaluation and assessment of incidents;

- Identification of incident management team members;
- Determination of roles and responsibilities;
- Assignment and management of tasks; and
- Communication with key stakeholders.

### **3. Definitions**

#### **Staff**

Any person Highview employs, or engages - including paid employees, volunteers (including parent employees), Board Directors, contractors, consultants and student placements.

#### **Incident**

Any event that has (or has the potential to have) an impact on Highview students, staff or operations.

#### **Serious incident**

An incident that has been rated as major or catastrophic and requires immediate escalation, or rated as moderate with circumstances that may escalate and require monitoring. An actual or potential crisis.

#### **Crisis**

Any significant or threatening event with the potential to be contentious or dangerous, and deemed sufficiently serious for further action by senior management.

A sudden, generally unanticipated event that profoundly and negatively affects a significant segment of the school population and often involves serious injury or death.

Examples of a crisis may include, but are not limited to:

- Fatality, near fatality within the community
- Murder or suicide involving Highview Community families / or within the wider community.
- Attempted suicide
- A missing student
- A serious road accident (either involvement or witness)
- Physical or sexual assault or threat of attack
- Aggression verbal or psychological

- Severe OH&S risk
- Enforced school closure
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Acts of terrorism
- Major vandalism
- Natural disaster (earthquake, fire, severe storm, extremes in temperature)
- Fire / bomb threat, explosion, gas leak, chemical spill or other environmental hazard
- Major overseas event eg: Bali Bomb

A crisis is any significant or threatening event with the potential to be contentious or dangerous, and deemed sufficiently serious in terms of its actual or potential impact upon Highview students, staff, property, operations, community or the Maryborough.

Examples of a crisis at Highview may include:

- a) actual or alleged child abuse (e.g. sexual misconduct, ill-treatment, assault or any other behaviour that causes psychological harm);
- b) suicide of a student or teacher
- c) serious accident, illness, injury or trauma;
- d) serious security threat such as robbery, or a bomb threat;
- e) natural disaster (flood, fire, storm);
- f) serious public health issue (food/ water contamination, flu or measles outbreak); or
- g) any other event that may create significant adverse publicity (such as a historic child sexual abuse allegation).

**IMPORTANT :** A crisis may be immediately obvious or not apparent until further investigations are made into the incident. In either case, in the event of uncertainty always escalate matters of concern to the Principal. It is always better to over-report than under-report.

For large scale situations refer to the Highview Emergency Management Plan (Code Red / Lockdown / Evacuation). Follow up procedures as mentioned in this document will be guidelines for all crisis events.

## 4. Evaluating Incidents

### Initial incident evaluation

Upon notification that an incident has occurred or is about to occur, unless the incident is very minor in nature and requires local management only (e.g. minor first aid), staff must notify the Principal, or her delegate, who will conduct an immediate initial evaluation of the incident impact.

**IMPORTANT: In the event of any uncertainty, always escalate to the Principal.**

Evaluate the incident by answering the following questions:

- a) What has occurred?
- b) Where has it occurred?
- c) When did it occur?
- d) Why did it occur?
- e) Has anyone been injured?
- f) Will operations be interrupted?

1. Do I need to escalate?
2. The 4 Question Test can be used as a guide to decide if an incident should be escalated. Has there been, or is there any possibility of:
  - Serious harm or threat to health or safety?
  - Significant operational or financial impact upon Highview?
  - Breach of any law, regulation or agreement by Highview?
  - Reputation risk to Highview including adverse messages on social media?
3. Unless the answer is NO to all of the questions above, escalate to the Principal or her delegate.

## 5. What to do in a crisis - first 5 minutes

The following should be used as a checklist by the Principal, or her delegate, upon initial notification of a moderate, major or catastrophic incident:

| Step | Action   | Completed |
|------|--|-----------|
| 1    | If required, call Emergency Services on 000, evacuate and/or administer first aid if required.<br><br>Refer to Highview's Evacuation [and other] Procedure.  |           |
| 2    | Evaluate immediate danger and/or potential impact - who, what, where, when, why?   |           |
| 3    | Assess the impact of the incident or threat in consultation with other senior staff  |           |
| 4    | Contact key internal and external stakeholders listed in the Communications Tree to commence incident management procedure (Appendix X)  |           |
| 5    | Keep a log of all actions taken and action items to complete (Appendix X)  |           |
| 6    | Contain information on a 'need to know' basis and if further escalation is not required, manage the incident locally in close consultation with Board and external assistance until it is agreed that developments (such as publicity or injury) are controlled. |           |
| 7    | Manage immediate operational crisis issues   |           |
| 8    | Investigate (if required), file all documents and review incident after an appropriate time has passed to ensure corrective actions have been completed and in a timely manner.  |           |

## 6. Implementation

### In the event of a serious accident, sudden death or similar event

#### Crisis Checklist

- Notify the Principal
- Direct staff and others not to repeat information until it is verified
- Convene the Executive and Middle Managers and assign duties
- Contact support (Ministers / Chaplain / Counsellor)
- Be flexible: DELTA lessons may need to be extended
- Inform (if needed) closest friends of the affected student and provide support
- Prepare a formal statement / announcement

- Announce time and location of emergency staff meeting
- Identify other additional students / staff and parents likely to be most affected by the news
- Hold emergency staff briefing
- Make official announcement
- As needed, assign Heads of School to monitor the yard
- Co-ordinate counselling with Chaplain / External Agencies
- Co-ordinate safe areas (e.g. Chapel – Set up urn, food and drinks)
- Reschedule classes from rooms if necessary to provide further areas
- At the end of the day, collect student's belongings from locker
- Remove student's name from all class rolls
- Contact Bus Company
- Provide support for affected staff

## **7. Assessing and Managing Crisis**

Obtain and analyse as much factual information as possible; establish, clarify and confirm details of crisis; identify and prioritise objectives when managing a crisis.

### **Evaluate, by answering the following questions:**

1. What is the current situation and treatment so far?
2. Is there a danger or threat still present?
3. What authorities are involved?
4. Has or will operations be interrupted?
5. Are the media aware of the situation?

### **Contain crisis**

1. Identify potential people, operational or public impacts, and implement actions to mitigate them.
2. For each action, allocate a person/s responsible and expected duration of task.
3. Ensure all open matters that are to be continued are adequately resourced.
4. Identify which influential stakeholder(s) will be affected by the crisis and decide communications strategy.

## **Review and reassess regularly**

Re-assess the situation periodically in close consultation with decision makers until it is agreed that developments (such as publicity or external authorities) are controlled.

## **Recovery**

1. Once the crisis is over, be prepared to continue to assist with recovery efforts.
2. Finalise any outstanding log/record keeping actions.
3. Ascertain any role-specific learning's and ensure integration of learnings into the related Policies and Procedures.
4. Debrief staff, and ensure counselling continues to be available to staff, students and other people affected.
5. Ensure the incident has been notified to insurer, including scanned documentation, notes and action items.
6. Review the incident after a period of time to identify any ongoing issues

## **8. Counselling**

Staff and students involved in a serious incident should be monitored to determine whether trauma counselling or other assistance is required. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselling services accessible for staff. Children, families and visitors involved in/or witness to a serious incident will also require monitoring and referral to counselling services.

The Principal must ensure that counselling services are available to all affected people and that lines of communication are open and ongoing with those affected (and their families) until the incident has been appropriately resolved. In some cases this may involve providing assistance to parents and families with how to speak to their child or loved one about the incident.

## **9. Communications**

The communications information included is a general framework but should not be relied upon in a crisis as the circumstances will dictate the communications advice required.

## **Authority and Responsibility**

The Principal, or her delegated authority, is responsible for the management of all communication with the media, community and government. This should also be done in conjunction with the Chair of the Board of Directors where practicable.

## **Handling the Media and Social Media**

Refer to Appendix H - Dealing with the Media and Social Media in a crisis.

Under no circumstances should contact or comment be made to the media by any Highview staff or volunteers. This also means refraining from stating 'No comment' as this can be construed negatively.

### **Briefing staff**

All frontline staff with access to the public or who answer phone calls must be briefed about how to respond to crisis related enquiries from the media. Staff should be directed to conduct the steps in Appendix 8 at "When approached by the media for a story or comment".

### **What to do when a journalist wants to do an interview?**

All media calls should be initially screened before an interview during a crisis.

### **What to say in an interview in/regarding a crisis:**

- a) Stick to the facts and avoid giving opinion
- b) Stick to key messages and keep coming back to them
- c) Be yourself and sincere; not scripted and 'robotic'
- d) Make your points simply and directly
- e) Remember it is ok to respond: 'I am really happy to answer that question but I need to do my research. Is it OK if I get back to you as soon as possible?'

### **What not to say in an interview:**

- a) 'no comment'
- b) Admit guilt or accept blame
- c) Speak in a verbose, rambling manner
- d) Speak about matters before the court or under police investigation in any way that could jeopardise proceedings

## **10. Accountability and Responsibility**

| Role      | Responsibility   |
|-----------|--|
| Principal | Demonstrate due diligence and understand her duty of care to staff and others.<br><br>Ensure staff have access to this procedure and related |



|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
|                           | procedures and understand their obligations.   |
| Senior Teachers and Staff | <p>Take a visible and active role in promoting a culture of safety in all services.</p> <p>Ensure staff members and volunteers are appropriately trained to mitigate potential crisis incidents and to accurately report crises.</p> <p>Monitor and determine whether trauma counselling or other assistance is required for employees, volunteers and others who have been involved in or witness to, a serious incident.</p> |
| All staff and volunteers  | <p>Ensure they fulfil their duty of care at all times and make every reasonable effort to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of all students.</p> <p>Report incidents in line with Highview policies and procedures. Manage or assist with the local resolution of incidents.</p>   |

## 11. Resources

The Principal's PA holds the following records:

- A register of staff holding special qualifications
- Contact details for all staff and their emergency contacts

APPENDIX A – Sample responses to a crisis

APPENDIX B – Symptoms of reaction to a crisis or disaster

APPENDIX C – Incident management log sheet

APPENDIX D – Media and social media responses



## APPENDIX A - EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO A CRISIS

### 1. Incoming Phone Calls (after the initial period)

**Office Staff – manage calls as they come in.**

Read a prepared statement that includes:

- Basic details of the incident
- Your child is safe
- How it is being handled i.e. Counselling opportunities

### 2. Communication In Person

Some parents may arrive at the Highview Office to pick up their child. Reception staff tell them only what is on the prepared statement

### 3. Media

All media contact is handled by the Principal and the Public Relations Officer.

### 4. In response to suicide

- Highview will acknowledge the suicide as a tragic loss of life
- Highview will allow students to attend the funeral or memorial service
- Highview will provide support for students profoundly affected by the death
- Highview will organise a memorial service (in consultation with the parents)
- Highview may create a memorial for that student. Three appropriate ways to remember a student (regardless of means of death):
  - Plant something that will grow and flourish
  - Memorial rock
  - Anniversary book

Plus

- Create a book prize
- Scholarship or trophy
- Have an award
- Donate a musical instrument
- Mounting a photo

- Having a regular assembly/concert
- Annual cricket match
- Annual commemorative run
- Plant a rose and give one to the family
- **Ask the students!**

It is important to maintain an increased awareness for 'copycat' suicide attempts. Details will not ever be disclosed by Highview College.

Any of our students considered to be especially 'at risk' will be referred to a professional for support.

## **5. Draft Announcements / Letters**

### **Initial Announcement of a Crisis Event From the Principal to the students**

We have just been advised of a tragedy involving a member/s of Highview College. I am sad to announce that [Name] has died / been involved in a very serious accident.

As soon as we have more information we will pass it on to you.

There will be staff/ Chaplain in the Chapel to help those of you who need extra support in dealing with this situation.

As soon as we know the family's wishes regarding [Name's] funeral / memorial service we will share this information with you.

We ask that everyone continue with their regular classes, following their normal timetable today, please.

Let's have a moment of silence to remember [Name].

Our Chaplain [Name] will say a short prayer for [Name] and his/her family.

## **6. Suicide Announcement**

### **From the Principal to Students**

[Name] died by suicide on [Day]. As a school we extend our sympathy to [Name's] family and friends.

We encourage all students to consider the tragic nature of this death and to realise that death is final.

[Name's] death is a reminder to us all that suicide is not a solution to any of life's problems nor is it an act of courage.

Please let your teachers know if you would like to talk with a staff member or counsellor. A Funeral Service for [Name] will be held at [Place] on [Date].

Let's have a moment of silence to remember [Name].

Our Chaplain [Name] will say a short prayer for [Name] and his family.

## **7. Death from an Accident or Illness Announcement From the Principal to Students**

As many of you are aware, we were sorry to hear that [Name], a student in Year [?] of our school died on [Day] from [Reason].

The funeral arrangements have not been completed. As soon as we receive the funeral details we will announce them.

Those of you who would like to discuss your feelings about [Name's] death should speak to your Head of School. The Chaplain will be available to talk to you throughout the day.

Let's have a moment of silence to remember [Name].

Our Chaplain [Name] will say a short prayer for [Name] and his family.

Thank you for your co-operation today.

## **8. Draft Letters to Parents**

### **Notice of a Serious Bus Accident**

Dear Parents,

This morning, prior to school, there was an accident involving a school bus and a car. There were known injuries to the passengers in the car. The students on the [NameBus] witnessed the aftermath of the accident, but were not involved in it.

The children, although already asked at the scene of the accident, were asked again if they were injured in any way. If so their parents were contacted immediately by the Office Staff. Students were also asked if they wanted their parents to take them home and again some parents were called. Your child may show some delayed reaction to the accident. Please be alert over the next couple of days for symptoms of delayed reaction, including:

- a desire to be alone, unusually quiet
- loss of appetite
- problem with sleeping, nightmares
- difficulty with concentration
- crying
- angry outbursts, short temper
- headaches, upset stomach
- depressed, sad

Your child may also exhibit some physical complaints. Please contact the School Office to fill out an accident report if this is the case. The school will continue to offer support services for students needing help dealing with the accident.

Please contact the School Office if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely

Principal

## **9. Draft Letter – Student Sudden Death**

Dear Parents and Students,

On [Day], [Full Student Name], a Year [?] student at Highview was in a terrible accident. [Name] was hit by a car in [Location] and died instantly.

[Name's] death is a tragic, emotional loss for the whole Highview Community. I am sure all of us will make every effort to comfort and support [name's] family as they attempt to deal with this traumatic loss. There are no adequate words to express our sense of grief and sympathy for the family.

Because [Name's] death is felt so deeply by so many, on [day] we will be offering ongoing support by our Student Wellbeing Staff and Chaplain to discuss this accident and loss with both students and staff.

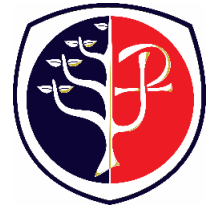
We encourage you to discuss this loss with your child. In order to help you do so we will be holding a parent meeting on [date] at [time], in the Library, here at Highview. The presentation will provide ways to help children to cope with loss and will be presented by [Name], a local Health Professional.

[Name's] family, friends and the school are suffering deeply. Please join with us as we support [Name's] family with our thoughts and our prayers.

Yours sincerely

Principal

## APPENDIX B – SYMPTOMS OF REACTION TO A CRISIS OR DISASTER



### 1. First Reactions

- Numbness, shock, difficulty believing what has happened
- Physical and mental reactions may be slow or confused
- Difficulty in decision making. Uncertainty about things

### 2. Ongoing Reaction

- Loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, loss of interest or pleasure in everyday activities
- Desire to get away from everyone (even family and friends)
- Emotional lability – becoming irritable or upset more quickly than usual
- Feelings of fatigue, hopelessness, helplessness
- Digestive problems, headaches or backaches
- Difficulty in accepting that the crisis has had an impact or accepting support from friends and the community

### 3. Symptoms of Reaction to a Crisis or Disaster (teenager)

- Excessive concern for others, guilt, anxiety and insecurity
- Sleeplessness or wanting to sleep all the time
- Withdrawal from family, spending increased time alone listening to music or watching TV
- Wanting to be around the family more than before or more dependent on family or other people
- Sudden need for independence expressing feelings like 'don't treat me like a child' and 'you're only my Mother'
- Unco-operative, irritable and only concerned with what is important to them
- Bored, listless and dissatisfied
- Unable to cope with responsibilities or duties, reverting to immature or other irresponsible behaviour
- Preoccupation with the trauma, wanting to talk about it all the time – or angrily refusing to talk about it

- More detached from life, the future or interests, and an unwillingness to set goals
- Want to do everything now; they are impatient or intolerant
- Pessimism and cynicism, loss of interest in the future
- Changed values and philosophy of life
- Poor concentration, memory, organisation, planning skills and reduced school performance
- Restlessness, always needing to be doing something or to be with peers
- Exaggerated emotional reactions to small problems
- Angry, controlling, assertive and demanding
- Exaggeration or return of previous problems

#### 4. Post-Traumatic Stress Reactions

(Indicating a need to refer the student to a professional)

| <b>Physical</b>          | <b>Cognitive</b>               | <b>Emotional</b>         |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Nausea                   | Slowed thinking                | Anxiety                  |
| Upset stomach            | Difficulty in making decisions | Fear                     |
| Tremors (lips and hands) | Difficulty in problem solving  | Guilt                    |
| Feeling unco-ordinated   | Confusion                      | Grief                    |
| Profuse sweating         | Disorientation (especially to  | Depression               |
| Chills                   | place and time)                | Sadness                  |
| Diarrhoea                | Difficulty concentrating       | Feeling hurt             |
| Chest Pain (should be    | Difficulty naming common       | Worry about others       |
| Checked at hospital)     | objects                        | Wanting to hide          |
| Rapid heartbeat          | Seeing the event over and over | Wanting to limit contact |
| Rapid breathing          | Distressing dreams             | Anger                    |
| Raised blood pressure    | Poor attention span            | Irritability             |
| Headaches                |                                | Feeling numb             |
| Muscle aches             |                                | Startled                 |
| Sleep disturbance        |                                | Shocked                  |

### **Suggestions that may be helpful**

- Take time to relax and do things that you find enjoyable
- Getting away for a short time with close friends
- Follow your regular routine for a while
- Avoid making changes even if it appears to be positive
- Get regular exercise
- Keep your days as simple as possible
- Avoid taking on any new responsibilities

If symptoms of stress persist beyond a few weeks seek professional help



# APPENDIX C - INCIDENT MANAGEMENT LOG SHEET



**Incident Name/Type**

**Date**

**Log Sheet Completed by (Name and Role)**

**Signature**

| Date | Time | Action | Responsible | Completed |
|------|------|--------|-------------|-----------|
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## APPENDIX D - MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSE

### Dealing with Traditional Media in a crisis - Print and TV

Sample script:

Example: Journalist calls the College and wants a comment for their story

'Thanks for your call. Unfortunately I'm not the spokesperson for Highview College. Can I please take your contact details and refer your inquiry to our communications team?' (Name, number, email, organisation)

'What information do you need?'

### Dealing with Social Media in a crisis

PR advice should be sought in the event of an actual or potential social media crisis.

General key points for responding:

- Explicit language, defamatory comments or those racially offensive should be removed from social media.
- Respond to the comment in 'real-time'. See to the problem straight away
- If the comment is unjustified or inaccurate, politely comment back with the facts of the situation.
- If the issue in question is the result of a mistake or oversight on the part of Highview, thank the user for bringing the matter to your attention and emphasise the steps that will be taken to correct it.
- Avoid inflaming the situation, or engaging in a battle of opinions.