

## Administrative Procedure 4180

### ***Tragic Event/Crisis Response***

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**Board Governance Policy Cross Reference:** [1, 12, 13](#)

**Administrative Procedures Cross Reference:**

[Emergency Drills](#)

[Emergency Preparedness](#)

[Public Relations and Consultation](#)

[Safe Schools](#)

[Violent Threat Risk Assessment](#)

**Form Cross Reference:**

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**Legal/Regulatory Reference:**

[The Public Schools Act](#), section 47.1(1), 47.1(3)

[The Education Administration Act](#), section 4(1)(p.1), (p.2), (p.3)

[Manitoba Regulation 77/2005](#), section 6 (Safe Schools Regulation)

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The Interlake School Division (ISD) supports an emergency preparedness program which includes emergency planning, training, and education. The purpose of the tragic event/crisis response protocol is to provide a practical guide to the Principal or designate, and staff dealing with the aftermath of a crisis which impacts the school. All schools require a written Crisis Response Plan to be created in conjunction with the Safe Schools Advisory Committee, crisis intervention staff and community agencies.

Crisis Response is dealing with aftermath of one of the following, but is not limited to:

- serious Injury/Illness;
- death of a student or staff member;
- death of influential community member;
- bus/car accident;
- fire;
- evacuations;

- “lock-down” situations;
- chemical spills; and/or
- natural disasters.

After a crisis has occurred, it must be addressed and dealt with as soon as possible. Accurate facts must be retrieved from reliable sources, such as police or family members, and then distributed to the school community as needed.

## **A. Planning**

The Principal must set up a school-based Crisis Response Team (CRT) composed of staff interested in providing support to the school under tragic circumstances. This may include the school counselor(s), Division psychologist and/or social worker, secretary, custodian, teachers, support staff, parent, student (High School), etc. The Principal or designate is the team leader. This team will meet every year in September and again mid-year to review the Crisis Response Plan and any other relevant material. The commitment for the team may run from September to September. This allows the team to be functioning before school begins in the fall, in case critical incidents have taken place over the summer.

### **Major Tasks of the Crisis Response Team include:**

- collect/confirm information about the event;
- communicate information to staff, students and others;
- manage the school, making necessary changes;
- secretarial duties – e.g. phoning, scheduling, etc.;
- coordinate supports for staff and students;
- organize commemorative actions;
- ensure team de-briefing occurs; and
- address post event concerns.

Planning should include readiness to respond to the traumatic after effects of a crisis. Planning should include:

- identification and contact information of members of Crisis Response Teams at school and Division levels (see school specific Emergency Preparedness Plan);
- protocol for the effective management of emergency situations; and
- training in the impact of trauma on systems.

Note: Not everyone is meant to be a trauma responder, but those with relevant training and experience may be very helpful for follow-up counselling and intervention during aftermath recovery.

School staff should also have an opportunity to discuss the plan with the school CRT members at a staff meeting or in-service session. Topics might include procedural matters and the dynamics of

grief and trauma reactions. Student Services staff will often be a source of expertise in carrying out the training.

## **B. Standards of Behaviour**

The overall direction for these standards is the maintenance of a calm, orderly school atmosphere that reflects professional sensitivity in coping with the trauma of a critical incident.

### **1. Calm, Orderly Approach:**

The Principal or team leader, with the support of response personnel, provides the leadership to minimize anxiety and create an atmosphere of sympathetic calm.

### **2. Focus on Accurate Data:**

All facts must be verified with the RCMP/parents/guardians by the Principal or designate. Caution needs to be taken when receiving information obtained through third party or social media.

### **3. Keep Staff and Parents Informed:**

Staff members need an overall understanding of the grieving process and their role in the crisis response plan. Parents must be kept informed about the situation and the information being provided to their children. Stress is increased if individuals are not informed of the pertinent details.

### **4. Maintain Normalcy in School Operations in an Empathetic Manner:**

Try to maintain as normal a routine as possible with appropriate supports.

## **C. General Steps for a Crisis Response in Schools**

### **1. Phase 1 – Initial Response for the Student System (see Appendix A – Tragic Event Response Chart)**

- a) A CRT member, Principal or designate receives a call that a crisis has occurred. The Principal or designate calls Superintendent/CEO or designate. The Principal verifies the information with the RCMP/or family. The school CRT is notified.
- b) School phone tree is activated. Facts are shared and an emergency staff meeting is organized.
- c) If the crisis impacts another site, the Superintendent/CEO or designate notifies the Principal at the other site and determines action to be taken and if additional supports are required.
- d) If required, the Superintendent/CEO will involve Student Services staff.
- e) The Superintendent/CEO or designate meets with the school CRT members to organize and to review the verified and relevant information and to determine if additional Division or community supports are needed. The Division coordinates additional supports. At this time, a statement is prepared to read to the staff.
- f) Devise a written statement to be read to all students by their teacher or other designated staff. Give information on the incident in a low-key and factual manner. Identify resources available to students (counsellors, clinicians, etc.)

- g) The school CRT meets with additional supports to organize, review information, and assign roles.
- h) An emergency staff meeting is held with school staff to review the crisis response and identify high risk individuals. The CRT members are introduced. Locations for the various services are identified.
- i) Designate grieving room with supervision as appropriate.
- j) CRT is activated under the direction of the team leader.
- k) CRT meets with school staff throughout the day, as needed, to provide updated information and monitor needs.
- l) CRT meets with school staff and administration at the end of the day to debrief and assess needs and supports for the following days.
- m) CRT to determine appropriate ways to commemorate a tragic event in consultation with the family. Identify students at risk. It is healing for the student and staff to commemorate a loss in a visible manner. It is helpful, especially for young children, to do so in a timely manner so that resolution is possible. Some examples of commemorative actions include lowering of the flag (consult with Superintendent/CEO), moment of silence, memorial service (in high school it is recommended to engage the affected students in the planning process), memorial fund or plaque, yearbook entry, display in the showcase or focal area, donations/flowers/sympathy card/letter of sympathy, tree planting
- n) Decide what course of action will be used to deal with potential “shrines” created by classmates of the deceased after a student death.
- o) CRT meets two weeks after the event to assess and monitor.

## 2. Phase 2 - Comprehensive Strategic Assessment

Children’s grieving process is dependent on the adults’ grieving process. Children wait for clues from the adults they are exposed to, to proceed with the grieving process. It is often **after** the adults have gone through the grieving process and are doing okay before children begin their grieving process.

### Key Points:

- a) This phase begins as soon as the CRT is organized and operational.
- b) The CRT leader, Principal and/ or designates, with other appropriate personnel should assess and monitor the school staff response to prior crises.
- c) Common aftermath reactions are reviewed from a community perspective.
- d) Identify high-risk staff members. Assess and monitor unique and unpredictable responses.
- e) Identify high-risk students. Assess and monitor unique and unpredictable responses. If barriers seem to exist between the adult and student systems that did not exist prior to the crisis, secret keeping may be occurring.

- f) Projections for length of trauma response intervention should start to be made including assessing the magnitude of the event (crisis versus traumatic event). Data should be obtained that can help to determine if additional team members are needed, where they are needed and for how long.

### **3. Phase 3 - Community Intervention**

The purpose of the parent/community communicate or meeting is to help parents understand the facts surrounding the crisis or traumatic event and to understand the possible impact on students, parents and community initially and throughout the recovery period.

The communicate or meeting is meant to be psycho-educational and a way to keep the school and community system open. By including parents in the sharing of information, the sole responsibility for recovery is no longer limited to the school.

Parents should be used as resources to guide important issues that may arise regarding the aftermath of a serious crisis or traumatic event.

#### **Key Points:**

- a) Many crises and traumatic events get played out emotionally within the school setting even though the school is not the source of the trauma (i.e., a student commits suicide at home yet the school is often responsible to determine a response plan rather than the community).
- b) Parent/caregivers have a tremendous influence over how the school adult systems respond to trauma. Relationships between school staff and parents prior to a crisis often determine the course of recovery.
- c) If parents are not included or choose not to be part of the systems response to trauma there is greater likelihood the school system will be forced to be closed under the burden of sole responsibility for the caretaking of students. Parental openness and responses to trauma will influence their children's responses and/or recovery from trauma.
- d) Parents have their own histories with school and crises and may be more traumatized than their own children. By sharing information with parents, the appearance of secret keeping or exclusion is significantly diminished.
- e) When parents and schools work together, recovery can be healthier and quicker.

## APPENDIX A TRAGIC EVENT RESPONSE CHART

