CUNDALL MANOR SCHOOL

Critical Incident Policy 2026

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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. Pupils, parents, staff (teaching and support) may experience acute - even prolonged - trauma or distress. Experience at Cundall Manor 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.

Critical Incident

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.

Crisis

A critical event or point of decision which, if not handled in an appropriate and timely manner (or if not handled at all) may turn into a disaster or catastrophe.

Aims

We aim 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.

Minimising Risk in School Activities

The Health and Safety Policy aims to develop a robust culture of risk assessment at all levels throughout the school.

- Ensure all risk assessments are in place and centrally located as well as in teacher's records. 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.
- Ensure insurance fully covers all school activities and staff actions
- Ensure staff are fully trained and aware of all school policies
- Ensure transport meets standards required
- All visits out of school to be risk assessed by staff and then signed off by the -- in person before they leave. These must be copied and held in school
- A full and accurate list of any child participating in an activity or out of school visit to be held in school as well as taken by each member of staff on the visit
- Information relevant to each child, e.g. medical, personal etc. is to be on the risk assessment and taken on the visit
- A list of contact numbers for each child to be held in school
- An emergency number circulated to be used only by staff on a visit, which is NOT the school number. The school line will become blocked very quickly.

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

Incidents involving several members of the school community	**Incidents involving a single member of the school community**	**Operational Incidents**	**Events beyond the school**
Deaths or injury on school journeys or during school activities Large scale disaster involving children and or staff A criminal act affecting a pupil or member of staff Children who join school already traumatised by incidents elsewhere	Death of a pupil or member of staff Serious injury or death in school Act of violence involving a pupil or member of staff Fire, explosion, building failure etc. Vandalism, arson, burglary Child protection issues	Computer theft or systems crash Breach of trust Major loss of infrastructure – e.g. loss of a major teaching area, loss of essential utilities Serious Data Loss e.g. files, documents and records that support the running of the school	Epidemic or Pandemic Civil disturbance and local violence Events occurring on holidays affecting families of children

Contingency Plans

These must consider what would happen in the event of a crisis including areas of responsibility and lines of delegation and communication. This is covered in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2

Communication and 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 and that clear, written, advice from the Critical Incident Management Team should be provided to those responsible for disseminating information within the School.

ICT & Communications

ICT will play a crucial role in the school's response to a critical incident. The Marketing Department at Cundall Manor will offer advice and counsel on how best to employ the benefits of digital media in response to the specific issue at hand. All external communications would in normal circumstances be managed by the Headmaster in conjunction with the relevant members of the Senior Leadership Team. Depending on the nature of the incident he may also liaise with the School's Insurers and lawyers.

Key Personnel

Full details of Key Personnel and contacts in the event of a Critical Incident are in Appendix B. At the same time all staff should be mindful of this policy and their duties as it is entirely possible that Key Personnel may themselves be affected by a Critical Incident.

Local Support Services

Council Emergency Planning Unit

The School has established a formal link with North Yorkshire Local Resilience Forum. Considerable expertise and support is available from the County Emergency Planning Unit who can be contacted on https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/your-council/get-touch/contact-us.

In addition, other Emergency services, social services, local media may all have a role to play.

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 other's' roles: this will require occasional but regular in-service training.

Appendix A

Crisis Action

Once the Headmaster or a Deputy Head has been informed of the potential for a critical incident the following broad guide to action should come into operation:

- In the event of an emergency at school i.e. a major health and safety issue, the fire alarm will sound and all pupils, staff and parents on site will assemble as for the normal fire drill.
- The Headmaster will work together with the Action Team to draw up an action plan for the supervision and well-being of the children and the safety of all staff and pupils.
- The Headmaster or senior staff will contact emergency services if necessary.

Boarding Evacuation Protocols:

- Should the Boarding House require a full, extended evacuation, the boarding population will move to Gym under the direction of House Staff and SLT. Time and circumstances permitting, pupils will be asked to pack some comforts and an overnight bag. Once in the Gym, pupils will be made as comfortable as possible and will be supervised by duty staff. Pupils have access to fresh drinking water and wifi. Boarding staff will contact parents/guardians for possible collection. The Critical Incident Policy would be actioned as necessary.
- Should the Gym be compromised too, the boarding population will move to the Pre Prep Buildings where there is an office to make phone calls, water and toilet facilities.
- In the unlikely event of the whole site being compromised, the boarding population would move to the Village Hall (Head of Boarding to liaise with Staff in charge) which offers kitchen, office, potable water and some ablutions.

Immediate Action

i. Obtain information about the incident.

ii. Take immediate necessary action to contain the incident. iii. Assess the magnitude of the incident with reference to: -

a. Extent and severity of the problem
b. Jeopardy of pupils and staff
c. Jeopardy of local population
d. Reputation of the school
e. Breach of law or regulations
f. Likely media involvement

iv. The Headmaster or his deputy should then, if appropriate, inform the relevant members of the action team and call an immediate meeting. Appoint a team leader who reports directly to the Headmaster or deputy. The team leader is responsible for ensuring that team members undertake the tasks allocated to them, and that they are able to communicate effectively.

v. The Headmaster or deputy then briefs members of that team, including external members.

vi. All team members should maintain a log throughout the crisis. This is particularly important should litigation follow the incident.

All relevant forms will be contained in an emergency box.

There are 3 sources:

a. School Front Office
b. Head's Study
c. Finance Office

vii. Ensure lines of communication are adequate.

viii. As part of the pre-incident preparation a global mailing list will be comprised – this will include

a. SLT
b. Cundall Manor Staff

An alert email will be sent out immediately a critical incident is decided

ix. Ensure all party leaders and members of staff in charge of activities have an emergency number to use, which is not the school phone.

x. Prepare to give families accurate and immediate information. Consider bringing them into school and what you will need for them.

xi. Bring in staff to man switch boards/handle enquiries. They must be clearly briefed and make a note of all calls received and parents contacted.

xii. A member of staff should be briefed to make calls to parents.

xiii. Ensure that when contacted, parents are offered emergency numbers of hospitals and that lone parents are not left alone without support.

xiv. The Head will inform the Governors to keep them informed.

xv. The Head must ensure that all relevant external bodies are informed, i.e. police, health and safety etc. xvi. The Head should appoint a team to relieve staff from ordinary duties if they are dealing with an incident.

xvii. The Head should inform all staff as soon as possible and remind them about comments to the press from anyone other than the authorised staff spokesperson.

xviii. The school should tell all pupils simultaneously and carefully about what has happened where it is deemed age-appropriate to do so.

xix. Staff should answer questions from pupils as honestly and as straight forward as possible and say so if they cannot answer. xx. School closure should be avoided but if the school is to close the Head should inform parents and children by the end of that day.

xxi. Normal school routine should be continued if possible.

Short term Action

The Head and appointed team members will: -

- Re-unite children with parents as soon as possible
- Assess whether (and if so when) it is safe and appropriate to open school
- Arrange a de-briefing for staff involved to clarify what happened, share feelings, offer reassurance
- Manage and listen to staff
- Listen to children who want to talk but remember that some may not wish to do so
- Offer help to pupils not involved
- Monitor children involved in any trauma
- Always remember to express sympathy in public on all occasions and in private to those directly affected, their families and friends; a member of staff to liaise with families would be advisable. If any casualties are reported, the Next-of-Kin (NoK) of any pupils who have been killed or injured should be informed as soon as possible. NoK of any deceased or very seriously injured must be informed face-to-face. In such circumstances, the initial notification will be done by a police officer, to be followed as soon as is practicable, by a visit from the SLT. NoK may be invited to the school to receive news.

Medium Term Action

The Head and appointed team members will: -

- Help children to return to school
- Keep in contact/Visit any injured parties
- Deal with worries about work for staff and/or pupils
- Set up sanctuary if they feel the need for quiet (Wellbeing Lodge)
- Hold special assemblies and memorial services if appropriate
- Keep in touch with families
- Carefully monitor progress to assess effects
- Set up counselling sessions as appropriate
- Rebuild facilities as appropriate

Long Term Action

The Head and appointed team members will: - ● Mark anniversaries

- Monitor vulnerable children
- Support staff involved in any legal processes
- Try to minimise guilt and blame which are the normal reactions to trauma and support all involved

Media Guidelines

The following media procedures need to be in readiness at all times.

General Principles

The Head or a Deputy Head must identify the person(s) responsible for dealing with the media. A press briefing may need to be arranged. All public statements must be made with the knowledge and approval of the Head or his deputy – no other members of the staff or action team are authorised to deal with the media.

Statements should always be honest and, in a fast moving situation, reflect the best information known at that time. NEVER say 'No Comment'.

Where the Head or deputy deem it appropriate, the school accepts responsibility – but not liability- and explains the chain of events in place to resolve the issue. Where appropriate, show human emotions. In a life and death situation someone who appears genuinely sad at the events is believed and respected much more than someone who barks responses to questions and argues about their validity.

Never allow unescorted media access to the site. Parents, children and staff colleagues should be protected from intrusive publicity.

Co-operate with the media, remember they can help the school in dealing with the incident and we will need their co-operation in the future.

Post-incident follow-up

Resume normal operation of the school only after clearance has been given by appropriate external authorities and under the direction of the Headmaster.

Issue a review report to all parents that covers: - ○ the nature of the incident ○ the severity of it ○ action taken ○ consequences ○ its resolution and recommendations for the future.

Appendix B – Action Team

Member	Role	Email
Simon Weale	Headmaster	hmpa@cundallmanor.org.uk
Clare Stovin	Deputy Head	clarestovin@cundallmanor.org.uk
Debbie Pitt	Business Manager	debbiepitt@cundallmanor.org.uk
	Estates Manager	maintenance@cundallmanor.org.uk