



Critical Incident Policy

Reviewed	Date of Next Review	Responsibility
October 2025	October 2026	Head of Finance

Our Mission:

'To enable young people to live and work without barriers'

Our Values:

- **Teamwork** – we hold ourselves and each other to account and are better when we work together
- **Compassion** – we act with trust, honesty and kindness in everything we do
- **Inclusion** – we treat each other fairly and with respect
- **Innovation** – we encourage thoughtful, creative and aspirational ideas
- **Pride** – we encourage each other to be proud of who we are and what we do

1. Purpose

A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of an organisation. Critical incidents are sudden, unexpected and unpredictable. They fall outside the range of normal experiences, potentially affecting many people and can cause high levels of personal distress, fear, stress or injury. Critical incidents vary and may cause disruption to the smooth running of a setting and can affect people both physically and psychologically. Providing appropriate support following a critical incident is part of emergency management.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure Fairfield Trust (FT) prepares for and effectively responds to emergency situations and critical incidents through the appropriate use of resources. The prevention and effective management of emergency situations and critical incidents can assist to minimise the negative impact of an unexpected event. This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, Trustees and learners.

Aims

- To provide a safe and secure environment for learners, staff and visitors
- To establish protocols and procedures so that staff can act quickly and appropriately following an incident to ensure clear routes of support that will mitigate the impact.

2. Definitions

- An emergency is an unplanned or imminent event that affects or threatens the health, safety or welfare of people, property and infrastructure and which requires a significant and coordinated response. The defining characteristic of an emergency event or situation is that usual resources are overwhelmed or have the potential to be overwhelmed. Emergencies may be a specific event with a clear beginning, end and recovery process, or a situation that develops over time and where the implications are gradual rather than immediate.
- Emergency management is the coordination of an emergency response and the management of recovery. The aim of emergency management is to minimise physical and psychological impacts on all parties.
- A traumatic event is one in which a person experiences, witnesses or is confronted by experiences that involve actual, threatened or perceived death or serious injury and/or threat to own or others physical and emotional integrity.

A critical incident affecting FT may include (but is not limited to):

- Fire
- Gas or water leak
- Vehicle and/or other accidents involving several learners/staff
- Chemical, radiation or biological spill
- Storm, snow (see Adverse Weather Policy)
- Significant natural disaster
- Bomb threat or terrorism
- Civil disorder or illegal occupancy including terrorism
- Hostage situation

- Robbery
- Incident involving high media profile
- Physical (including sexual) assaults
- Unexpected/sudden death of a student or member of staff through terminal illness, sudden accident, violence or suicide
- Serious injury or accident involving a member of staff or a learner(s) which could occur on or off-site
- Epidemic/pandemic
- Transport accident involving staff or learners
- Significant event in the community I.e. a transport accident
- An event witnessed outside of the site I.e. serious accident or an assault

Important Factors

- The suddenness of the occurrence
- The shock effect
- The apparent uniqueness of the occurrence
- The need for any support to be available very rapidly
- The publicity and attention which sometimes follow
- The need to communicate with a number of people quickly
- The need for support for those directly affected, and for the large
- Number who might be indirectly affected (pupils, teachers and parents)

3. Principles

Emergency management planning involves being prepared for events or incidents that stretch our ability to cope beyond normal day-to-day capacity. FT is committed to the protection of staff, volunteers, learners and visitors during emergencies. We will act swiftly and respond effectively to emergency situations, with the aim of preserving life, protecting property and restoring normal activity as quickly as possible.

4. Outcomes

Emergency situations are prevented as far as practical. The negative impacts of emergency situations and critical incidents are minimised through effective management.

5. Functions and Delegations

Many organisations have found it useful to have a Critical Incident Team (CIT) which may be part of their emergency planning. The Senior Leadership Team will take on the functions of the CIT when a critical incident occurs. The Principal should call a meeting of this team at least annually to update names, contact numbers, checklists and procedures.

6. Risk Management

Trustees and staff should be familiar with this policy and their responsibility in relation to Critical Incidents. Emergency evacuation drills are undertaken under the instruction of the designated Fire Safety Officer.

Critical incident plans are reviewed annually and/or following the event of a critical incident. As far as possible, traumatic events are prevented, and the impacts of trauma are minimised following distressing events.

7. Policy Implementation

All staff have access to and are familiar with policies and procedures relating to critical incident management and staff have information which outlines actions to follow for various disaster and emergency situations.

8. Prevention

Whilst no amount of planning can prevent accidents and incidents occurring, it is hoped that some can be prevented and the impact minimised by taking sensible precautionary measures. It is expected that:

- All staff and learners should be familiar with the Trust's routines for fire and the evacuation of the building on hearing the fire alarm.
- The PWG Tutor will prepare a bank of resources (books, leaflets, helplines etc) which can be immediately available in the event of a bereavement or a critical incident.
- The Education Manager will use curriculum planning to allow issues such as life cycles, death and bereavement to be explored sensitively through well-chosen literature and discussion.
- All staff should be familiar with the routines and procedures for dealing with emergencies including Lockdown processes (see separate policy).
- All staff and learners should be familiar with the Trust's security procedures, that all visitors not wearing a visitor's badge should be questioned and escorted to Reception.
- All staff are aware of learners with medical needs or health problems and staff will have received appropriate training to administer medications.
- All staff should sign in and out of the premises when leaving or entering site within the normal working day.
- All staff are aware that they should assess associated risks to young people before carrying out an activity.
- All staff should read and understand the Trust's Lockdown policy.
- SLT will review the Business Continuity Plan and Risk Register annually.

Off Site Visits and Trips

- All staff organising trips and visits must follow the relevant Trust guidelines and the event leader should develop a comprehensive risk assessment in advance of the event, ensuring mitigation measures are in place where risk is identified.

- The risk assessment should include details of any medications due for administration during the event and plans for how/when these will be administered when outside of the usual setting.
- Any controlled drugs that are required to be taken off site for the purposes of administration will be carried securely in line with the Medication Policy.
- When staff are leaving sites with groups of young people, it is essential that all staff and young people are signed out. This could be in the form of a list or register which may be left with Reception staff.
- The event leader must ensure that an emergency contact number is provided to Reception prior to departure. It is the responsibility of the person organising the trip to ensure that the phone is always charged/switched on and, on their person, whilst off site.

9. Risk Assessment

FT staff will use risk assessment processes across the organisation to identify and control barriers to effective emergency management. Staff, trustees, learners, volunteers and customers are expected to behave in a way which minimises the risk of emergencies occurring.

10. Critical Incident Procedures

When a disaster or emergency situation arises, the primary aim of the response is to ensure the safety of all people, preserve life and protect property.

Action within the first hour

- Convene the CIT and notify emergency services. The Principal has responsibility for what happens in the college and is therefore responsible for the actions of the CIT.
- **Contact the families of all those involved.** The college will maintain a list of emergency contacts for pupils and staff and an effective process will be in place to ensure that all people on site can be accounted for. In the event of serious injury or death, the police will be involved and they are likely to take the lead on information sharing with relatives in person. It may be helpful for a member of staff to be present.
- In other circumstances, making contact with families should be prioritised and done quickly and sensitively by the organisation. If the contact person cannot be reached via telephone, a brief message should be left asking them to contact a specific number. Do not leave complicated messages.
- When sharing information to a wider audience IE parents/carers, the information will be factual, prepared in advance and prepared with due care and consideration.
- Blame should not be attributed. Remember that the media may get access to this statement.
- The CIT may need to set up an incident room to deal with calls, make necessary calls, inform transport and LA where and if required.

- Assess continuing risk – Is it likely that further injuries or damage may occur? If there is continuing risk, the first priority must be to safeguarding the welfare of the learners, staff and visitors. We will ensure that any immediate action to protect people or property does not give cause for further risk. If there is high risk, this should be included in the Trust's risk register and reviewed annually.
- Trigger support from external agencies where necessary. In all events, we will contact the Chair of Trustees. The Local Authority should be informed, and it may be appropriate to inform Social Care and Educational Psychology Services.
- Inform Reception staff so that they can give a factual statement to anyone calling the organisation. This should include reassurance that the matter is being handled and appropriate action is being taken. If further details are needed, the caller should leave their details so that the line can be kept open.
- If possible, dedicate a specific phone line to outgoing calls. IE a personal or work mobile phone or a house phone.
- Family may want to attend the scene of the incident, or they may want to attend the Trust site. Family members will need to know whether their son/daughter will be returned home.
- Learners use of mobile phones to contact home will need to be monitored.

Inform Staff

- Provide staff with factual details of the incident so that they feel confident when handling questions or queries that may arise. Let staff know when this information will next be updated. Encourage staff to direct their questions to the CIT when in any doubt. Express to staff that they should not talk to the media. This will minimise the risk of mixed messages.

Inform Learners

- Tell learners what has happened and ensure to allow them to ask questions. The Principal will decide whether it is best to inform learners in small groups or individuals. This will be best managed by a staff member who is well known to learners and who will be confident in handling their reactions.

Dealing with the media

- Communications with the media should be managed by the CIT. The Principal should focus on the welfare of the learner and staff community and responsibility for dealing with the media should be delegated to other senior staff.

Action within the next few hours

- Arrange a debrief for those involved in the incident. It may be helpful to consider a different process for casualties, witnesses and the wider community.
- Consideration should also be given to:
 1. *Whether separate briefings will prevent any escalation*
 2. *The differing needs of learners*
 3. *Whether all parties need to know all information, exposing everyone to the same levels of stress*
 4. *The closeness of the individuals involved*
 5. *Is there a good reason to respect the confidentiality of someone involved*
- Inform the wider community – Consider whether neighbouring education settings should be informed. Especially if siblings may be at other settings.

Longer Term Actions

If we face a major critical incident, we may need to utilise the resources of our community (parents, agencies, Local Authority, Trustees and other agencies) to support the organisation. In some situations, we may need extra help to provide emotional support and counselling. IE from health trusts or voluntary organisations. Offers of help will need to be closely managed and offers should be considered carefully to ensure they best meet the needs of learners and staff. It is clear that forward planning will be invaluable if such an event occurs.

Education managers should identify any inappropriate curriculum content and leaders/managers will ensure that staff are well equipped to manage a range of emotions. Outside agencies may be able to help and offer support to staff.

Information Sharing and Planning with Staff

Staff may feel responsible for supporting a learner(s) during times of crisis. However, they must also manage their own emotions. There are several reactions connected with a professional person having responsibility for the support of learners. Feelings of helplessness and inadequacy are not uncommon in the face of others' grief. It is important that staff members have support networks available to them and that the staff team feel able to ask for support themselves. Senior staff should seek support from appropriate outside agencies.

We must remember that staff are not trained counsellors. Staff will not be expected to provide bereavement counselling. Listening and providing comfort are the main skills required.

If a staff member feels unable to offer support, this should be acknowledged and accepted and another colleague should be asked to step in.

Information Sharing Sessions for Learners

Learners who may have witnessed a traumatic event, may benefit from structured de-briefing sessions. This will allow learners to express how they feel about what they saw or heard. This process will usually be handled internally. If it is felt that specialist help may be required, the appropriate consent will always be sought.

Managing Trauma

The management of a critical incident may result in a great deal of stress for those involved. It is therefore important to:

- Provide learners and staff with time and space when needed.
- Acknowledge that some staff may not wish to be involved in directly supporting learners.
- Be aware that the burden of support may fall disproportionately on a small number of staff. In this instance, relief sessions must be scheduled for these staff.
- Behaviours and relationships may be affected by learners who are triggered and/or emotionally vulnerable.
- Some learners may require external support who can help them develop coping strategies (consent required).
- Be aware of possible delayed reactions of those involved.

Recognition and Processes

Arrangements may be made to express sympathy to families directly affected by the incident. For example:

- Injured staff and learners may be visited in hospital.
- Learners may be encouraged to send cards and letters.
- Consider a memorial area and a book of condolence.
- Make plans to attend funeral or memorial service, provided the family are in agreement.
- Discuss special assemblies and special services.
- Anniversaries are key times and ensure that times such as these are handled sensitively.

Return to Learning

Learners and staff who were directly affected or injured as a direct of an incident will need significant support to reintegrate back into their usual roles and routines. Help will be provided to others returning after an absence IE:

- Staff who were on long term sick leave at the time of the incident.
- Anyone who missed debriefing sessions.

- Those who were not present on the day of the incident and who may have learnt of the event afterwards.

Re-establishing normal routines

All efforts will be made to provide as much consistency and continuity as possible for learners. We will endeavour to ensure that any disruption is kept to a minimum to ensure that learners are not unsettled.

11. Emergency Contact Numbers

Organisation	Contact number
Emergency Services	999
Local Police	101 (Non-emergency only) 0800 789 321 (Anti-Terrorist Hotline)
Frome Hospital	01373 454740
Trowbridge Hospital	01225 711300
Royal United Hospital, Bath	01225 428331
Counselling	HR will arrange counselling under the direction of the CIT https://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/search.php?search=BA13+4DL
Wiltshire Council	0300 456 0100 (to report a critical incident)

Fairfield College (Switchboard)	01373 823028
Fairfield Animal Centre	01225 759075
The Weavers	01225 859032

Vicky Dunncliffe - CEO	07512 307175
Graeme Athey - Principal	07856 916776
Tamasin Jones - Head of HR	07842 028688
Kate Durrant - Head of Finance	07842 425026

Approved by the Board of Trustees

Kate Durrant
Head of Finance
October 2025