



Critical Incident Policy

Policy

In the event of a critical incident, the RTO recognises that appropriate infrastructure must be in place to ensure the provision of all necessary support services.

This document outlines the RTO policy, support mechanisms and procedures for managing a critical incident.

This policy will ensure that the RTO has:

- An effective approach in responding to critical incidents as they occur;
- Appropriate support and counselling services available to those affected;
- Appropriate training and information resources provided to staff.

Under Standard 6 of the National Code 2007, Student Support Services, Registered Providers must support students to adjust to study and life in Australia, to achieve their learning goals and to achieve satisfactory academic progress towards meeting the learning outcomes of the course.

The intention of Standard 6 is to ensure that appropriate support services are available to international students to ease the transition into life and study in Australia and allow access to appropriate assistance for the student as needed.

Under Standard 6.4 the registered provider must have a documented critical incident policy together with procedures that covers the action to be taken in the event of a critical incident, required follow-up to the incident, and records of the incident and action taken.

1. Principles

The RTO recognises the duty of care owed to its students and that planning for the management of a critical incident is essential.

2. Definition

A critical incident is defined by the National Code as *'a traumatic event, or the threat of such (within or outside Australia), which causes extreme stress, fear or injury'*.

Critical incidents are not limited to, but could include:

- missing students;
- severe verbal or psychological aggression;
- death, serious injury or any threat of these;
- natural disaster; and
- issues such as domestic violence, sexual assault, drug or alcohol abuse.

Non-life threatening events could still qualify as critical incidents.



3. Critical Incident Team / Coordinating Group

When a critical incident occurs, the PEO, or their delegate will call a meeting with the appropriate staff to form a Critical Incident Team.

The Critical Incident Team is responsible for:

- assessing risks and response actions
- liaison with emergency and other services
- contact with students' relatives and other appropriate contacts
- liaison with other external bodies, such as home stays, carers or foreign embassies, and
- counselling and managing students and staff not directly involved in the incident.

4. Action Plan

The Critical Incident Team will set in motion a critical incident action plan to manage various aspects arising from the incident, including communication strategies.

This will include:

- creating and disseminating a plan and its procedures
- a review of the plan, and
- staff development and training.

5. Media Management

A media management process will be included in the management plan to ensure the most positive and supportive response from the media.

6. Reporting and recording of incident and action taken

The Educational Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (ESOS Act) requires the RTO to notify DET and DIBP as soon as practical after the incident and in the case of a student's death or other absence affecting the student's attendance, the incident will need to be reported via the Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS).

All aspects of the incident and its management will be recorded on the student files.

7. Follow-up and evaluation

The RTO staff will be made aware of the critical incident policy and procedures and be given appropriate training to ensure the duty of care for international students is uppermost in their minds. A review and evaluation of the response to the critical incident will be conducted and the procedures reviewed by the Critical Incident Team and/or other stakeholders.

8. Resources

Changes to the policy and procedures, including updating resources, will be made as soon as practicable following the review and evaluation.



Critical Incident Procedures

The RTO Critical Incident procedures detailed below include:

- Reporting and recording
- Flow chart and detailed action plan sample
- Evaluation and review checklist
- Staff training
- Resources and local links

Appendices A - F provide additional information and samples for the following:

- Staff training – things to remember
- Media hints
- Sample letters to parents
- Police involvement
- Death and funerals in Australia
- Other resources including a sample management plan

Any action taken in regard to a critical incident will be recorded to include outcomes or evidence if the incident is referred to another person or agency.

When an international student dies or other critical events involving students occur, the RTO of necessity, will take on many of the tasks which would normally be dealt with by the family of the victim were the incident to have occurred in the student's home country.

The RTO has in place efficient, sensitive and supportive strategies for dealing with a critical incident and provides support to members of staff, students and others in the community who are involved.



Reporting and Recording

The Educational Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (ESOS Act) requires the RTO to notify DET and DIBP as soon as practical after the incident and in the case of a student's death or other absence affecting the student's attendance, the incident will need to be reported via the Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS).

When an international student dies or sustains serious injury, the RTO may be required to assist the student's family.

This may include:

- hiring interpreters
- making arrangements for hospital/funeral/memorial service/repatriation
- obtaining a death certificate
- assisting with personal items and affairs including insurance issues
- assisting with visa issues

In addition the following need to be notified:

- Home stay or accommodation provider
- Library
- IT Services
- Utilities

On-campus Incidents

If the incident is on campus, the first action will be to contact the emergency services - fire, ambulance or police – as would be the case with other WH&S matters.

The PEO, or their delegate must also be contacted immediately when the incident involves death, serious injury or a threat to life or property.

Off-campus Incidents

If the critical incident involves a student or staff member and is off-campus, the person receiving the information must immediately contact the PEO, or their delegate who will communicate other staff as appropriate.

Key Details to be Reported

Key details to report include the time, location and nature of the incident (e.g. threat, accident, death or injury), names and roles of persons involved (e.g. staff, international or domestic student).

The staff member receiving the news contacts the PEO, or their delegate / Head of the Critical Incident Team.

The PEO, or their delegate urgently deals with an emergency situation then calls a meeting with the staff involved to make decisions as to how to proceed.



The staff most likely to be present will be:

- Each PEO, or their delegate
- PEO
- Administrator
- Trainer

The Critical Incident Team

At the initial meeting, the task of the group is to:

- create for themselves a clear understanding of the known facts.
- plan an immediate response.
- plan ongoing strategies.
- allocate individual roles/responsibilities for ongoing tasks.

Immediate response

Issues to be considered:

1. Contact with next of kin/significant others - what is the most appropriate manner of contact?
2. Arrangements for informing staff and students.
3. Guidelines to staff about what information to give students.
4. A written bulletin to staff if the matter is complex.
5. Briefing staff and delegating a staff member to deal with telephone/counter inquiries.
6. Managing media/publicity
7. Identification of those students and staff members most closely involved and therefore most at risk.
 - Those directly involved
 - Personal friends/family of those involved
 - Others who have experienced a similar past trauma
 - Other students, staff, supervisors etc
8. Arrange a time and place for an initial group/individual debriefing session with Counsellor/s.
In this session, an opportunity is given to share the impact of the event, discuss various interpretations of the event in cultural/ethnic terms, the resulting sense of vulnerability, the experience of painful emotions and the normalisation of reactions.
9. Organise a tasks timetable for the next hour/s, day/s etc.
10. Plan ongoing feedback and regular meetings so that the coordinating team is continually in touch and working together.



11. Confirm access to emergency funds if necessary.

Note One member of the team should record for all meetings to keep records of content and decisions.

Ongoing and follow up response

These issues may need to be discussed at subsequent meetings.

- WHO is the DECISION MAKER?
- WHO will FOLLOW UP?
- Availability of mobile phones
- Notification of and liaison with Sponsor/Agent if applicable
- Arrangements for visits to/from Family
- Liaison with Police, Doctors, Hospital Staff
- Hiring Independent Interpreters
- Death Notices
- Funeral/Memorial Service Arrangements
- Refund of student's fees to pay repatriation or associated expenses
- Copy of Death Certificate
- Consideration of personal items and affairs (household and academic)
- Insurance Matters, OHSC Coverage, Ambulance Cover
- Formal Stress Management interventions required for students and/or staff (release from classes, leave, rescheduled assessment or exams)
- Liaison with Academic Staff
- Arrangements for further debriefing sessions for groups/individuals as required
- Liaison with Department of Immigration and Citizenship if studies will be interrupted
- Fees issue to be resolved if student cannot continue with their studies
- Legal Issues: helping students get access to legal assistance if required.
- Arrangements for further debriefing sessions for groups/individuals as required
- Follow up condolence or other letters to Family
- Financial Assistance for families of affected person(s) if residing in Australia
- Organising students/staff for hospital visits



Student File Essentials

In addition to the RTO Student Management System, the RTO employ and use a file note system, keeping hard copies of student details in the Enrolments files. This will enable all required staff to monitor any student issues.

Include in the file will be the following information:

- Coloured Photograph
- Copy of Passport, including number, photo page, and visa page
- Student's address and telephone number
- Student's religion
- Emergency contact telephone, with next of kin details, agent or sponsor (if applicable)
- Any other identification details - student ID, course details, medical conditions, allergy information etc.



Critical Incident Flowchart

Staff member(s) (witness to incident or first contacted)

Gather factual information and Contact Emergency Services - Dial 000



Staff member(s) (witness to incident or first contacted)...

Ensure safety & welfare of staff and students

Contact first aid officer

Administer first-aid until ambulance arrives

Note: *Assess situation: focus on immediate safety of other students and staff*



NB: Once police or fire brigade arrive at the Institute they will determine if other resources such as State Emergency Services (SES) are required to assist.

Critical Incident Team member to liaise with emergency services

Staff: **Contact Critical Incident Coordinator**

Staff: **Give facts of the situation**

Staff: **Receive advice from Critical Incident Coordinator on debriefing & counselling**

Director / Principal manage incoming inquiries (and outgoing information via web, phone...)

Note:

Contact team leader within the hour

Debrief and counselling info as soon as practicable

Critical Incident Coordinator - Manage the media

Prepare a written statement

Note:

Within 24 hours



Reception: **Inform colleagues**

Note:

*Within 24 hours
Receive briefing from critical incident team*



PEO, or their delegate

Contact parents or families / friends of affected persons

Note:

Within 24 hours



PEO
Complete "Incident Report" form

Note:
Within 5 days

Additional Action (When appropriate)

PEO, or their delegate: **Convene brief meeting of the Critical Incident Team to:**

- discuss intervention plan
- obtain executive support



Contact Local Support Personnel

Support Personnel		
Counsellors	Trauma Counselling Services	
Nursing and emergency staff	Hospital	



PEO, or their delegate:
Convene full staff meeting of teaching and administrative staff to:

- present information
- discuss action plan
- allow staff response
- decide on how students will be informed or given additional information



PEO: **Set up a recovery room in the school:**

- provide fluids
- comfortable chairs
- support personnel



PEO, or their delegate: **Inform students of:**

- facts of the incident
- school actions
- counselling services
- allow student discussion or response



Student Director and or Counsellors convene with first aid officers...

Identify "at risk" students and staff

Be aware of others who have experienced trauma
List of students involved



PEO, or their delegate: **Contact parents or families of "at risk" students and staff**



Student Director... **Arrange debriefing for "at risk" students and staff**
Organise for referrals to professional counsellors if required



Student Services/Counsellor... **Inform all parents via the RTO website**

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| • The facts of the critical incident | • the school's response plans |
| • possible reaction of students | • sources of help for families |
| • encourage two-way communication between parents and the school | |



Critical Incident Coordinating Group: **Restore the school to regular routine as soon as practicable**

- All staff can help here



Critical Incident Coordinating Group: **Obtain updated factual information**

- continue to inform staff, students and parents



Critical Incident Coordinating Group: **Continue to monitor well-being of students and staff**

All staff to report new information to Critical Incident Coordinating Group
Staff may use rapport with students to counsel or refer on to professional body... Critical Incident Coordinating Group to be informed of all referrals
Recovery time for staff involved



Checklist for Staff Managing Critical Incidents

The PEO, or their delegate will seek information about the incident and will request that the information is not immediately made public.

The PEO, or their delegate or nominee will urgently deal with an emergency matter then call a meeting with the following staff or their nominees as a Critical Incident Team:

- PEO, or their delegate
- Director of Studies
- Director student services
- Director Marketing/Communications
- Registrar

A PEO, or their delegate will be appointed to manage the RTO response.

Response Checklist

As soon as possible, the PEO, or their delegate will liaise with relevant staff to prepare a communication plan and nominate a spokesperson.

Communication

- response and ongoing strategies including individual roles and responsibilities
- liaison with police, doctors, hospital staff and other relevant professionals
- legal assistance if required
- follow-up letters to family
- incident report for the RTO records

Support for family, friends and staff

- next of kin (parents/guardian) to be contacted and support provided to family and friends
- arrangements made for visits from family and friends, e.g. accommodation, travel, crisis support and referral to appropriate services

**Checklist For Follow up, Review and Evaluation**

How well were the following actions undertaken by the Critical Incident Coordinating Group?
Please add comments below if you wish to clarify your choice.

1 = poorly; 5 = very well, most appropriately

Question	1	2	3	4	5
Decision maker clear					
Follow up clear					
Availability of mobile phones					
Notification of and liaison with Agent if applicable					
Arrangements for visits to/from Family					
Liaison with Police, Doctors, Hospital Staff					
Hiring Independent Interpreters					
Death Notices					
Funeral/Memorial Service Arrangements					
Refund of student's fees to pay repatriation or associated expenses					
Copy of Death Certificate					
Consideration of personal items and affairs (household and academic)					
Insurance Matters, OHSC Coverage, Ambulance Cover					
Formal Stress Management interventions required for students and/or staff (release from classes, leave, rescheduled assessment or exams)					
Liaison with Academic Staff					
Arrangements for further debriefing sessions for groups/individuals as required					
Liaison with Department of Immigration and Citizenship if studies will be interrupted					
Fees issue to be resolved for student unable to continue with their studies					
Legal Issues: helping students get access to legal assistance if required.					
Arrangements for further debriefing sessions for groups/individuals as required					
Follow up condolence or other letters to Family					
Financial Assistance for families of affected person(s) if residing in Australia					



Organising students/staff for hospital visits					
---	--	--	--	--	--

Critical Incident Staff Training

It is important for the RTO staff to be aware of the existence of the Critical Incident Policy and Procedures.

Resource workshop will be conducted regularly to locate all relevant community resources in immediate local area: Funeral Directors, Police and Medical Authorities, Religious Leaders, Ethnic Group Leaders, Media Representatives, Insurance Representatives, local Embassy or Consular representatives.

Stress management

1. Debriefing as soon as possible after the event on an individual or group basis
2. Further debriefing - one or more days after the incident (group basis)
3. Follow up 2 - 6 weeks later - (individual or group basis)
4. Ongoing counselling as required
5. Recovery time for staff involved and the Coordinating Team members.

Skills and knowledge

- Cross Cultural Skills
- Training Skills in Cross Cultural Communication
- Awareness of one's own values and biases and how they may affect the students
- Knowledge of resources on and off the RTO premises
- Uninterrupted access to those resources
- Communication skills
- Organisational skills
- Liaison skills
- Networking skills
- Stress Management skills
- Delegation skills
- Maintenance of clear and direct communication channels with decision makers
- Panic diffusion skills
- Skills to eliminate time lags
- Sensitivity to the issue of confidentiality
- Sensitivity towards different cultural expressions of grief and other emotions
- Protocol knowledge (eg: for repatriation to home country)
- Diplomacy skills
- Debriefing skills
- Monitoring skills for those affected by incident
- Recognition skills re: warning signs of risk to students affected by the incident
- Follow Up skills
- Advocacy skills (for students)
- Referral skills to legal, medical, religious assistance
- Recognition of one's own limitations
- Self care skills



Critical Incident Recovery Timeline

In order to successfully manage a critical incident, the RTO will always take appropriate action and provide support during and after a critical incident.

The recovery timeline following a critical incident will vary depending on the circumstances.

Immediately (and within 24 hours)

- Gather the facts;
- Ensure safety and welfare of staff and students and arrange for first-aid if necessary;
- Where possible notify the time and place of the debriefing to all relevant persons;
- Manage the media;
- Set up a recovery room;
- Keep staff, students and parents informed.
- Keep parents informed.

Within 48-72 hours

- Arrange counselling as needed;
- Provide opportunities for staff and students to talk about the incident;
- Provide support to staff and helpers;
- Debrief all relevant persons;
- Restore normal functioning as soon as possible;

Within the first month

- Arrange a memorial service, if appropriate;
- Encourage parents to participate in meeting to discuss students' welfare;
- Identify behavioural changes and the possibility of post traumatic stress disorder and refer to Health Contacts for Mental Health Services;
- Monitor progress of hospitalised staff or students;
- Monitor mental and physical health of all helpers.

In the Longer Term

- Monitor staff and students for signs of delayed stress and the onset of post traumatic stress --disorder - refer for specialised treatment;
- Provide support if needed;

In the Long Term

- Plan for and be sensitive to anniversaries, inquests and legal proceedings
- Access specialist support if needed.

**Emergency Numbers and Contact Details**

Police	000
Ambulance	000
Fire	000

Poison Info Line 131 126

Non Emergency Health Advice 13 HE AL TH
13 43 25 84

1. Dial 000 and identify the state / town you are calling from and the service you need
2. Remember to remain as calm as you can
3. Speak clearly and give the details as requested

The following details are for additional emergency services, national and/or state-based.

Reverse charge	12 555
Interpreting Services	131 450
ACPET	1800 657 644

Federal Government Support Numbers

Department of Education and Training ESOS Hotline	02 6240 5069
PRISMS Hotline	02 6240 7647
DIBP General Enquiries:	131 881
AEI-NOOSR (National Office for Overseas Skills Recognition)	1300 363 079
Australian Education International (AEI) Online	1300 363 079
Australian Passport Information Service	131 232
Centrelink - Studying and Training	13 2490
Consular Emergency Centre	1800 330 066
Customs Hotline	1800 061 800
DET General Enquiry Line	1300 363 079
Family Law Hotline	1800 050 321
Going to Uni - Student Enquiry Line	1800 020 108
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Complaints Hotline	1300 656 419
National Security Hotline	1800 123 400
National Training Complaints Hotline	1800 000 674
Overseas Skills Hotline (National Office)	1300 363 079
Privacy Enquiries Line	1300 363 992
Taxation - Personal Tax Info Line	13 2861
Trades Recognition Australia - Australian Recognised	1300 360 992



QLD State Support Numbers

Study New South Wales
studyqueensland.qld.edu.au

Counselling and Support Services

Abortion Trauma and Crisis Pregnancy Help	1300 737 732
Aids Line:	1800 133 392
AIDS Information	1800 177 434
Brisbane Health Services Information Line	07 3236 4833
Cancer Helpline, Information and Support Service	13 11 20
Crisis Pregnancy	1800 650 840
Drug-Arm	1300 656 800
Eating Disorders Association Inc.	07 3876 2500
Gambler's Help	1800 156 789
Lifeline	131 114
Statewide Sexual Assault Helpline	1800 010 120
Rape and Incest Survivors Support Centre	07 3391 0004
Men's Telephone Counselling Service	1800 600 636
Women's Health New South Wales-wide	07 3839 9988

Australian Rescue and Emergency Service

Australian Search and Rescue

<i>Aviation Rescue</i>	1800 815 257
<i>Maritime Rescue</i>	1800 641 792

State Emergency Service

http://www.emergency.qld.gov.au/ses/	132 500
---	---------



Appendix A

Staff Training: Things to Remember

1. **In the event of any critical incident, the first thing to do is calm the affected party/parties down and offer hope.**

Communicate simply, take control and give clear and practical directions in order to reduce the anxiety and connect the logic of the affected party/parties

2. **You are not superhuman.**

Managing a critical incident can be a very lonely time, especially if you are regarded as the focal link with international students at your institution. While you are busy providing care or support to those directly affected by the incident, your own health and emotional well-being may be at risk. Self-care should NOT be forgotten in your management strategy.

3. **Take time out each day to telephone or e-mail another colleague**

This will give you not only a chance to debrief, but also to compare notes with sympathetic colleagues who have had similar experiences and a real understanding of what you are feeling. You are helping others while you help yourself.

4. **Update the resources as necessary**

Insert as many local telephone numbers and contacts, and as much information as you can so that you can refer to the resources thereby allowing you to take effective and immediate action when necessary.

Who are you?

As RTO staff member, you are a person who interacts with International Students in a professional capacity.

You may be one of the first people notified in the event of a Critical Incident.

Ultimately, you are a concerned, caring, informed, capable, 'significant other' in the life of the international student.

His or her own family structure will be unavailable, so assume that you will be helpful and a positive influence, in spite of your 'outsider' role.

You, as an individual, will be more readily accepted than You as the Teacher or You as the Counsellor, or You as the Accommodation Officer.

Optimise your own personal traits. Remember that it is more than likely that the international student has sought you out because of **who** you are, not **what** you are.
So, follow your instincts and act accordingly.



Preparing yourself

How does one prepare for dealing with a critical incident in a cross-cultural setting?

The attitude you assume is of the utmost significance:

- Expect the unexpected. Not everything occurs between 9am and 5pm.
- Do not be easily upset or disturbed by even the most extreme situations.
- Convey empathy and respect for the emotions of those involved.
- Worry and fear should not be conveyed to the person.
- Provide a sense of stability and strength.
- Be able to alleviate tension and anxiety.
- LISTEN - to what is said.
- LISTEN - to what is not said.
- Create a personal equilibrium between your own values and those of a different value system, but keep the values of the client foremost in your mind.
- There will be times when you are unavailable. Don't be consumed by guilt. As long as policy and procedures are in place, there will be someone else who can step in and fulfil the required role.
- Network with ethnic groups in the local community. Keep a list of useful contacts who may be able to assist in matters not directly related to the RTO: religious customs, family support, interpreters, embassy or consulate contacts.
- It is not always important to remain within the specific religious affiliation to receive help in an emergency situation. Helping, coping, counselling skills are not religiously oriented...sensitivity is common to all members of the clergy. Keep this in mind when seeking assistance.
- Learn as much as you can from foreign nationals about how they would deal with specific scenarios - Ask questions:
 - *"How should the body of a Muslim car accident victim be handled when the Coroner demands an autopsy and religious custom prohibits?"*
 - *"How does one act at a Chinese Buddhist funeral service? What is the proper way to express condolences?"*
 - *"How is mental illness regarded in your country?"*
 - *"What is the attitude toward rape in your country?"*

The idea is to gain knowledge in advance, whenever possible. Keep in contact with support networks like ISANA. Whether by telephone or e-mail, there will always be someone available to use as a sounding board.



Preparing Others

Many staff respond that they are not qualified to handle international students in crisis.

Eradicate this 'us and them' attitude by engendering team- work among staff with regard to assisting international students. Let them know that they can be of invaluable assistance in a crisis by offering short-term training and workshops.

Establish and maintain your own network of 'contacts'. Try to include as wide a variety of types and levels of staff as possible.

Keep in regular contact whether formally or informally, as these contacts will be your most reliable allies at a moment's notice.

Conduct training regarding the Critical Incidents Policy for International Students. It is important for staff to be aware of the existence of such a policy.

Conduct a resource workshop to locate all relevant community resources in your immediate local area: Funeral Directors, Police and Medical Authorities, Religious Leaders, Ethnic Group Leaders, Media Representatives, Insurance Representatives, local Embassy or Consular representatives.

Coordinate and conduct a Mock Exercise to simulate a Critical Incident. Have the exercised observed and assessed by an outside party.

Follow up with a debriefing and feedback session, inviting Counsellors to educate participants about Stress Management, Post Traumatic Stress and general counselling principles when dealing international students.

Conduct general Cross Cultural Awareness training at regular intervals.



Appendix B

Sample Letters

Letter to Parents

(Sample letter in the event of a tragedy)

Dear Parents,

The school has experienced *(the sudden death, accidental injury)* of one of our students. We are deeply saddened by the death/events.

(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost)

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. *(Elaborate)*

It is possible that your child may have some feelings that he/she may like to discuss with you.

You can help your child by taking time to listen and encouraging them to express their feelings.

If you would like advice or assistance you may contact the following at the school:

PEO, or their delegate

Yours sincerely,



Letter to Parents (Under 18 student)

(Sample letter requesting consent for involvement of outside professional/s)

Dear Parents,

Following the recent (tragedy, ...) we have arranged professional support for students in school who need particular help. (.....) is available to help us with this work. This support will usually consist of talking to children, either in small groups or on a one-to-one basis and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate.

Your son/daughter has been identified as one of the students who would benefit from meeting with the psychologist. If you would like your child to receive this support please sign the attached permission slip and return it to the school by_____.

If you would like further information on the above or to talk to the psychologist, please indicate this on the slip or telephone the RTO.

Yours sincerely,

Staff...

Title...

RTO

.....

I/We consent to having our daughter/son met by a psychologist.

I/We understand that my daughter/son may meet the psychologist(s) in an individual or group session depending on the arrangements which are thought to be most appropriate.

Name of student:

Date of Birth:

I would like my daughter/son to avail of the support being offered by the psychologist.

Signed.....(Parent/Guardian)



Appendix C

Media Hints

In many cases, the institution would prefer not to issue a press release upon the death of an international student. However, in anticipation of some requests for comment from the media, it is advisable to have a press release drafted by Media staff just in case.

Listed below are some helpful hints, which can be used and applied within the role of the Critical Incident Team:

1. "No Comment" = Not a good idea.
2. A good press release should answer the following questions:
What? How? When? Where? Why?
3. Add a joint statement from the PEO, or their delegate (or from staff representatives with a student support focus) which will signify unity and dissuade the press from looking for an 'alternative angle' on the story. The statement should include an expression of surprise and sadness at the tragedy, as well as compassion for the family of the victim.
4. A comment should be included explaining the RTO's policy on responding to this kind of situation. In addition, if the situation warrants, it would be appropriate to comment on what measures will be put in place to ensure that any future events of this nature are avoided.
5. A telephone contact for further information is always left at the bottom of a press release. The Critical Incident Team should determine who will be responsible for media inquiries, and all staff should be alerted to the procedure for directing media inquiries to this person.

Sample media release

A sponsored male student from India, 31, has died at, in metropolitan New South Wales.

The PEO, or their delegate,, said the incident had saddened the RTO staff, its student body, and the international student community.

"We are all dispirited at the loss of a very promising young man. Our profound condolences go to his family", said.

A memorial service staged at the RTO yesterday was attended by more than people, including academic staff, International Student Support staff, family, friends, and classmates

Note: *The release is short and to the point. It depicts the RTO as a caring institution, a position reinforced by the fact that the memorial service was held on the RTO's own grounds.*

Note that the release was issued after the memorial service, to avoid the likelihood of media coverage at the service itself. The cause of death has been revealed, because of the young age of the deceased.



Should media investigate further, it is suggested that the PEO, or their delegate respond with a statement saying simply, "We are sure you will understand that we are not prepared to discuss any of the personal issues which may have been associated with this young man's death. It has always been our policy to respect the privacy of our students and their families."

Managing the media

Each critical incident is unique and the dynamics of each situation will have to be assessed when it occurs. It is important that a structured approach to media management is developed and is included in the management plan to ensure the most positive and supportive response from the media.

Take the media calls

The PEO, or their delegate or nominated person should handle the initial media calls. Be sure to return media calls as soon as possible.

It is important that the department has an input in media coverage so that the story is balanced. Therefore avoid answering questions with "no comment". Respond to questions accurately, however it may be necessary to explain to the media that you are unable to answer their questions at this time because:

- i. of the sensitive nature of the issue or
- ii. you do not have the information available.

It may be necessary to check with the police, ambulance or fire brigade etc, before making a statement.

Response time is important

Officers likely to be contacted by the media need to be alerted immediately and kept informed as more details come to light. Inform reception as soon as possible that the incident has occurred, even if the details are unclear. The "Media liaison officers" will need to be informed of the incident. They will be able to assist by handling media inquiries. The "media liaison officer" will liaise with the PEO, or their delegate regarding the situation.

Channel all media inquiries through one person

The Director will liaise directly with the media as more details are known.

Relate to journalists in a positive and friendly way

Enlist the support of the media to report accurate information and avoid being defensive. Journalists are professionals too. They have been assigned the job of reporting the story. They feel the public have a right to know and they will report the story with or without the RTO's co-operation. In a major disaster, the media is an essential means of communicating information, e.g. providing hot-line phone numbers, etc.

Working with the media representatives as professionals and providing them with accurate information about the incident means staying in control. Cooperation can make the difference between inaccurate reporting resulting in a story that reflects negatively on the



school or the department and one which shows our caring role and our ability to respond effectively in a crisis.

Emphasis should be placed- in media comment- on the support available to students and staff.

Determine what the official response will be

Media liaison officers may be able to provide advice to staff about other developments or broader issues that may need to be considered when framing the response. They may also be able to offer advice about the most effective methods of responding to newspaper, radio and television interviews.

EXPRESS CONCERN * RESTRICT ANSWERS TO FACTS * ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

It is appropriate, for example, to:

State the facts about what has occurred and what is being done.

For example: when and where it occurred, how many people were involved or hurt, how much damage has been done, etc.

Describe the assistance being provided for students and staff who may have been traumatised.

Explain that the whole RTO has been deeply shocked, that all available resources and support services have been gathered and what steps are being taken to rectify the situation and get things back to normal as soon as possible.

It is imperative to avoid making comments which imply blame or fault for any part of the incident, as there could be significant legal implications.

Official inquiries – e.g. by the police - are likely to follow serious incidents. Media comments on the public record may have a bearing on proceedings at such inquiries.



Appendix D

Police Involvement

While critical incidents are not only cases of sudden unexpected death, the police and others must be contacted.

The police are required to investigate all cases of sudden unexpected death. Police actions include:

- Reporting such death to the Coroner
- Notifying next of kin
- Obtaining official identification of the deceased (this must be done by someone who has known the deceased for some time)
- Conducting investigations on behalf of the Coroner - for example, interviewing witnesses and others who may have been involved, collecting clothing and other items for use in evidence, delivering specimens for analysis.

Coronial Investigations

Every death reported to the Coroner must be investigated. The body of the deceased will be taken to the morgue where it may be viewed by the relatives but not touched.

Once the coronial inquiries are complete (and this may take some time), the body will be released to funeral directors to await instruction from the next of kin. At this stage the body may be touched.

Post Mortems (autopsies)

Most reported deaths require a post mortem examination to determine the medical cause of death. This usually involves an internal and external examination of the body, and of tissue, organ and blood specimens taken from the body. Cultural and religious objections to a post mortem may be discussed with the coroner or a court social worker. However, these objections very rarely influence the coroner's decision to conduct an autopsy.

Inquests

An inquest is a public hearing before a coroner (and occasionally a jury) to decide the circumstances of death. Once initial investigations are completed, the Coroner may (as in 90% of cases) dispense with an inquest. However, the Coroner may order an inquest or, in certain circumstances (such as murder), an inquest may be legally required.



Appendix E

Preparing for Funerals

This information is taken from materials published by the Australian Funeral Directors Association. A variety of reading material is available.

Inquiries may be directed to:

Australian Funeral Directors Association – QLD Branch

PO Box 291
Kew East VIC 3102
(03) 9859 9966

<http://www.afda.org.au/>

Arranging a funeral

When faced with having to make funeral arrangements, most people have no prior experience in organising such an event, and little idea of what to do.

Initial interviews with the funeral director can be at a location nominated by you. While some people may have a fairly clear knowledge of the arrangements they want to make, others may want to consider a myriad of alternatives before making any decisions. The funeral director is there to guide and advise on the many matters which need to be considered.

Decisions to make will include:

- Time and location of the funeral
- Type of service
- Burial/cremation (reflection of the religious or ethnic attitudes and family traditions)
- Type of coffin
- Viewing arrangements
- Choice of participants
- Floral arrangements, motor vehicles and other relevant matters

The funeral director

The funeral director will take responsibility for arranging, with the family concerned, the time and place for an appropriate funeral service by coordinating and liaising with clergy members, doctors, hospitals and cemetery or crematorium officials.

The funeral director will lodge notices in the press, arrange floral tributes, provide a hearse and other vehicles, a funeral chapel and any other facilities and personnel required to carry out the wishes of the family being served.

All official forms must be completed and taken to the appropriate people at the right time. The funeral director, for example, registers the death with the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages.



The funeral director ensures that human dignity both of the deceased and the survivors is preserved, and performs tasks in a sensitive and understanding manner.

Kindness, helpfulness, understanding and the empathetic handling of funeral arrangements are the vital psychological components of the funeral director's role.

When someone dies

When death occurs, the first practical consideration in most cases will be the need for a doctor's attendance. In Australia today, relatively few people die at home and in most cases the medical necessities and formalities will be taken care of by the relevant hospital or other authorities.

The deceased's doctor or the hospital authorities will explain what steps, if any, are required to establish the cause of death and complete the necessary death certificate. Meanwhile, the family may begin making their desired funeral arrangements, which can be completed when the death certificate has been signed.

The funeral ceremony

All reputable funeral directors are able to provide a broad range of services to suit the precise requirements of the bereaved family.

Funerals can be as different as the people they are for, with their main purpose being to help the bereaved in the first stages of grief.

The order, style and content of service can all be varied to suit the family's needs. A personal tribute from a family member or close friend, or perhaps including appropriate cultural traditions, may make the service more meaningful.

Special circumstances

Deaths from Suicide and AIDS may sometimes present special problems because of old religious discrimination and/or social stigma. Nevertheless, the need for people to mourn and the rituals of the funeral are still essential for friends and family.

When there is no body (e.g.: drowning accidents, abduction) it is still important to acknowledge the life of the deceased and help the family and friends to accept that death has occurred. A special memorial service to allow everyone to say goodbye and be able to get on with their grieving is essential. The use of photos, significant objects associated with the deceased's life, and perhaps candles are a great help to use in place of the body.

Grieving

Grief is not a single response, but a complicated series of feelings, emotions and even physical manifestations of a person's reaction to the bereavement.

Grieving is an intensely personal process. Each death is unique and everyone affected will respond differently. Most survivors however, will pass through similar stages of grief from initial shock, numbness, and often denial and anger to realisation, acceptance and finally re-adjustment.



The intensity of grief experienced will be affected by a number of factors, including the degree of attachment to the deceased and the duration and quality of relationship with them. The greater the attachment, the longer it is likely to take to resolve grief.

However it is not the passage of time itself which brings resolution, but the working through of stages of grief. A meaningful funeral service can play a significant part in the crucial early stages of grieving.