



SERIOUS INCIDENTS POLICY

1. RATIONALE

In our Catholic school communities, we have a duty of care to create and maintain safe environments for all members of the community at all times, especially when a serious incident disturbs or threatens that community. Serious incidents can and will occur within school communities and expose staff and students to the risk of physical, emotional and psychological harm. Schools, and the systems to which they belong, must respond to incidents responsibly, compassionately and comprehensively in order to care for their community members, to promote wellbeing and to ensure recovery.

Appropriate preparation and training, and the provision of effective support, are essential elements that will enable a school community to effectively respond to, manage and recover from a serious incident. It is the responsibility of the Catholic Schools Office to plan and resource the appropriate preparation, training and support to ensure that school communities respond to, manage and recover from serious incidents.

This policy reflects the Nature and Purpose of the Catholic Schools Statement, especially the commitment to:

- nurture each individual's growth in faith and unique potential
- create communities of respect for each other, the wider community and the earth.

2. AIMS

St Joseph's Primary School Merriwa aims to:

- Follow the Diocesan Serious Incidents Policy in order to
 - Provide effective support in the event of serious incident, and
 - Optimise the potential for recovery of all concerned in a serious incident.

3. DEFINITIONS

3.1 What is a Serious Incident?

In 1999 the NSW Department of Education and Training replaced the term 'critical incident' with 'serious incident' in the guidelines for managing such events or incidents in schools. The definition was expanded to include incidents that could interfere with the usual functioning of a school day (Donnelly, M. 2006). A serious incident is any event that lies outside the ordinary day-to-day experiences of the school community and causes significant disruption to the school or sections of the school. It can cause members of the school community to feel threatened, unsafe, and vulnerable to immediate and/or ongoing physical and psychological harm.

A serious incident can be as the result of a sudden unexpected event or the result of an accumulation of stressful events. Within a community, a number of events may occur one after the other and each event may appear to be manageable. However, the accumulation of these events may compromise the wellbeing of the school community, and/or individuals within that community.

Serious incidents may impact on a few members of the school community or they can impact significantly on the whole school community. Consideration must also be given to other schools and communities that may be affected, and to the psychological impact that may occur after a significant tragedy in the wider community.

3.2 Characteristics of Serious Incidents

There are various characteristics of incidents that may have significant impact on a school, or on individuals in the school community. Serious incidents may display some of the following features:

- are dangerous or distressing
- are sudden and unexpected
- occur following long-term exposure to a stressor(s)
- are disruptive to a person's sense of control of events occurring around them
- are disruptive to a person's beliefs and assumptions about the world, people and work
- include element so physical or emotional loss, or the threat/risk of loss

It is important for school and CSO leaders to understand that an incident or situation that may not be regarded as 'serious; or 'critical' to one person, may present very differently to another. An incident may be escalated in 'criticality' because of unknown personal or environmental factors. This aspect of serious incidents directs CSO leaders to continually monitor the wellbeing of both students and staff.

3.3 Examples of Serious Incidents

Serious incidents within school communities can include but are not limited to:

- suicide of a student or staff member
- serious illness or death of a member of the school community
- a student or staff member lost, killed or injured on a school excursion or camp
- a threat to life due to a medical condition, contagious or acute illness in the community
- threats or actual harm caused to a member of the school community or the school itself
- student explosive behaviour events, or student violence
- injury and accidents to students or staff
- negative attention from media and/or police
- natural disasters (eg flood, earthquake, fire) that impact on the school or the local community
- chemical spills
- harm caused to school animals
- property destruction or vandalism
- theft of school property, student and staff work products
- witnessing a traumatic event
- threats to the school, resulting in lock-down or evacuation
- enforced school closure
- violent event in the community
- violent world events

4. IMPLEMENTATION

- The school will follow the CSO Serious Incident Policy for its own response to Serious Incidents
- The CSO policy outlines roles and responsibilities within the school and system
- Given the nature and context of St Joseph's Primary School Merriwa, the entire staff will form the SIMT
- Local information such as emergency contact numbers, phone tree and local community trade contacts are attached to this policy.
- Resources included in the CSO document will be used to support the implementation of this policy as the need arises

5. EVALUATION

This policy will be reviewed in 2016 and/or following its use in a serious incident.