



## About this Critical Incident Kit

This kit is intended to serve as a supplement to an education provider's critical incident policy to support ISANA NZ members and others handling critical incidents affecting the international student community.

Should your school or institution not have a specific policy in place for handling critical incidents involving international students, a generic policy template (pp.6-8) is included for you to adapt for your purposes. This will hopefully assist your action plan in the event of a critical incident and raise awareness of your role at higher levels within the institution.

*Disclaimer:* The Critical Incident Kit offers principles and strategies informed by experienced practitioners and is not presented as a *best practice* template.

### KEY PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER:

1. **In the event of any critical incident, the first thing to do is calm the affected party/parties and offer hope.** This 'first up' encounter focuses on the present alone. 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 requires a coordinated team approach and should not be a lonely experience. Self-care is integral to your management strategy. While you are busy providing care or support to those directly affected by the incident, your own health and emotional wellbeing may be at risk.
3. **Take time out each day to telephone or e-mail other affected practitioners or ISANA colleagues.** This will give you not only a chance to debrief, but also an opportunity 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 **Customise this kit to your particular needs.** Insert as many institutional local contact details as you can and add as much relevant information as you

can so that you can use the kit as a stand-alone resource; thereby allowing you to take effective and immediate action when necessary.

Finally, whether you are a veteran or a novice in Critical Incident management, we hope that you will never have cause to refer to this kit. However, put it in a handy and visible location in your office, and alert your colleagues to its existence just in case.

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## WHO ARE YOU?

As a member of ISANA or international education practitioner, you are a person who interacts with international students in a professional capacity.

You are probably working in one or a range of the roles as listed below:

- International Student Director
- International Student Adviser
- International Dean
- Student Counsellor
- Accommodation Manager/Coordinator
- Residential Adviser
- Residential Tutor
- Academic/Course Adviser
- Teacher or Academic Staff
- Exchange or Study Abroad Adviser
- Admissions Officer
- Health Service Worker, etc

In many if not most cases, you will be one of the first people notified in the event of a Critical Incident.

Ultimately, you are a concerned, caring, capable, informed, '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 have a positive influence in spite of your 'outsider' role. You, as an individual, will be more readily accepted than You as the Adviser or You as the Counsellor, or You as the Resident Tutor.

Optimise your own personal traits. Remember that it is more than likely that international students respond to you because of **who** you are, not **what** you are. So, follow your pastoral instincts, confer with your coordinated response team and act accordingly.

## **Ethical Practices in the provision of Education to International Students**

Institutions should establish an appropriate infrastructure to provide the focal point for all inquiries and to ensure both effective implementation of the institution's international student program and the provision of **all** necessary support services.

### **Guidelines - *Student Support & Welfare***

Institutions should develop appropriate student support services including access to professional counselling services that assist student to resolve problems that are negatively impacting their studies.

By enrolling international students, the institution assumes not only an educator responsibility but also a service provider responsibility.

When an international student dies, educational institutions of necessity will take on many of the tasks which would normally be dealt with by the family of the deceased had the death occurred in the student's home country. Institutions therefore need to have in place efficient, sensitive and supportive strategies for dealing with such an event. In the absence of such strategies, there is potential for confusion and conflicts to occur between individuals over issues of confidentiality. It is essential that institutions provide support to members of staff, students and others in the community who will be involved.

## DEFINITIONS

A Critical Incident as defined for the purpose of ISANA members is as follows:

*'A tragic or traumatic event or situation affecting a student/students which has the potential to cause unusually strong emotional reactions in the school/campus community.'*

Examples of critical incidents in the international student arena include, but are not limited to:

### **Death**

(Including death of a dependant residing in New Zealand)

Accident

Suicide

Result of an injury or terminal illness

Murder

**Serious Illness** which causes the deterioration of the student's health over time.

**Serious Injury** which prevents or severely affects the student's ability to continue with or complete the course.

Serious illness or injury would probably not be considered a critical incident in the broader campus community.

However, considering the relatively close-knit nature of most international student communities, and their physical isolation from the familiar support networks, critical incidents of this nature can have a wide reaching and often long lasting effect on a student's ability to cope with their studies.

## **POLICY TEMPLATE**

### **RATIONALE**

This policy template is offered as an adjunct to (*institution name*) generic Critical Incidents policy to support practice tailored for international students.

### **DEFINITION**

A critical incident is defined as a tragic or traumatic event or situation affecting a student/s and/or staff member/s which has the potential to cause unusually strong emotional reactions in the international student community at (*institution name*).

### **PROCEDURE**

When a critical incident has been identified:

1. The staff member receiving the news immediately contacts the international student programme leader and the senior management team
2. The head of the coordinating response team calls an immediate meeting with the following staff to make decisions as to how to proceed:
  - Head of the international programme
  - Member of counselling or student health service
  - Dean or head of faculty/department the affected student is enrolled with and/or
  - Representative of the senior management team

**This group becomes the Coordinating Team**

### **THE COORDINATING TEAM**

At the initial meeting, the task of the team is:

- To create for themselves a clear understanding of the known facts.
- To plan an immediate response.
- To plan ongoing strategies.
- To 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 International Student Office staff (or equivalent) 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 normalization 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. (In the case of death) Contact the school/Academic Registrar's office to put a stop on the student's record.
12. Confirm access to emergency funds if necessary.

**NOTE** *One member of the team should scribe 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 phone/s
- 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, ACC Coverage, Ambulance Cover
- Formal Stress Management interventions required for students and/or staff (release from classes, leave, rescheduled assessments or exams)
- Liaison with teachers, academic staff or supervisors
- Arrangements for further debriefing sessions for groups/individuals as required
- Liaison with Immigration 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.
- Arrangements for further debriefing sessions for groups/individuals as required
- Follow up condolence letters to Family
- Financial assistance for families of victim if residing in New Zealand
- Roster of students for hospital visits

## **STRESS MANAGEMENT COMPONENTS**

(Often falls within the role of counsellor)

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 *[your position]* and the Coordinating Team members.

## **STUDENT FILES**

### *USE A FILE NOTE SYSTEM*

It will enable you and others to monitor student issues.

Include 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.

## **KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS**

*Needed within the Coordinating Team. See Policy Template.*

- Intercultural knowledge and skills
  - Awareness of one's own cultural values and biases and how they may affect the students
  - Intercultural communication skills
  - Sensitivity towards different cultural expressions of grief and other emotions
  
- Institutional knowledge
  - Knowledge of resources on and off campus
  - Uninterrupted access to those resources
  
- Organisational skills and protocol knowledge
  - Liaison skills
  - Networking skills
  - Maintenance of clear and direct communication channels with decision makers
  - Skills to eliminate time-lags
  - Sensitivity to the issue of confidentiality
  - Delegation skills
  - Debriefing skills
  
- Personal and professional attributes
  - Stress management skills
  - Monitoring colleagues affected by incident
  - Panic diffusion skills
  - Diplomacy skills
  
- Pastoral skills
  - Recognising warning signs of risk to students affected by the incident
  - Follow up skills
  - Advocacy skills (for students)
  - Referral skills to legal, medical, religious, etc assistance.

## **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.
- After the initial shock work on managing your own emotional state and seek support.
- Convey empathy and respect for the emotions of those involved.
- Worry and fear should not be conveyed to immediately affected persons.
- Through the Coordinating Team convey a sense of stability and direction.
- 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 campus: religious customs, family support, interpreters, and embassy or consulate contacts.
- It is not always necessary at all times to use a specific religious group to support a religious student in an emergency situation. Helping, coping and counselling skills are not confined to religiously orientated pastoral care, i.e. warmth, love and sensitivity are universal virtues.
- Learn as much as you can from foreign nationals about how they would deal with specific scenarios. Be ready to ask questions.

### **Religious and ethnic considerations**

See New Zealand Police *A practical reference to religious diversity* (2012) available online.

Questions to consider: "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 \_\_\_\_\_ (country)?”

The idea is to gain knowledge in advance whenever possible.

Again, keep in contact with other affected practitioners and ISANA colleagues on a daily basis.

Whether by telephone or email, there will always be someone available as a sounding board.

## PREPARING OTHERS

Many campus staff respond that they are not qualified to handle international students in crisis. Work on minimising this *Other* attitude by encouraging a team approach among staff for 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 across school/campus, especially in departments with large numbers of international students. 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 across school/campus regarding the Critical Incidents Policy for International Students (see Policy Template). 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 exercise 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 intercultural awareness training across campus at regular intervals.

## **POLICE INVOLVEMENT**

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

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

## **Coronial investigations, post mortems (autopsies) and inquests**

For information related to coronial investigations, post mortems (autopsies) and inquests consult with the police officer leading the investigation into the student's death.

## **FUNERAL INFORMATION**

The Funeral Directors Association provides professional information and advice about arrangements for a funeral: <https://www.fdanz.co.nz/>

For religious considerations when supporting the family of the deceased student see: <https://www.police.govt.nz/about-us/publication/practical-reference-religious-diversity>

## **NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF HEALTH SUPPORT**

Ministry of Health (2019) advice for coping after a traumatic event, which is available in a number of languages:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/mental-health-and-addictions/mental-health/mental-health-advice-coping-after-traumatic-event>

## **MEDIA**

It is advisable for the Coordinating Team to liaise with senior management and (if available) the communications office to deal with media should the need arise. In many cases, institutions prefer not to issue a press release upon the death of an international student, but in case of a media request for comment it is advisable to have a press release drafted by senior management.