

# Respond collaboratively to critical incidents

When a learning community is affected by a critical incident, a collaborative response is required. Communities with a critical incident management plan in place will be able to provide the best support to children, young people, educators and families.

## After a critical incident

Following a critical incident, it will be important for your community to come together for support. It's important for you to understand your role in your community's response. A collaborative response is likely to minimise the potential negative impact on your wellbeing and the wellbeing of children and their families.

This module refreshes some of the information from the Recognise module about critical incidents and their impacts. It builds on this information by exploring the key components of a whole learning community response to a critical incident.

## Support a staged response

This module explores a staged response:

- preparations before a critical incident occurs to minimise the impacts of the event
- immediate response after the critical incident to restore a sense of safety, begin the communication process and return to learning
- recovery efforts in the short and long term after the incident, to support resilience and recovery.

## Critical incident management plan

A critical incident management plan contains all the information required to respond effectively. This includes information such as the contact numbers of an emergency response team, actions to take, task allocation and more. It aims to minimise the adverse effects of a critical incident on the learning community and restore everyday routines as soon as possible. Regularly reviewing emergency and critical incident management plans is important to the effectiveness of your learning community's response.

## A whole learning community approach

Fostering a responsive learning environment provides ongoing support to those who need it while also ensuring children and young people have opportunities to process what's happened in a safe and supportive environment.

You play a critical role by focusing holistically on the child or young person, creating an inclusive learning environment, reinforcing appropriate behaviour, encouraging positive learning, working closely with families and having regular conversations with colleagues.

After a critical incident, you can create a feeling of security and model healthy ways of coping and leadership. Your role is to act as a mediator, educator and facilitator to support recovery – continue to teach and support children as you normally would, while playing your role in the learning community's additional proactive steps to deal with the critical incident and promote recovery.

## Restore a sense of safety

After a critical incident, you can foster a responsive learning environment. A responsive learning environment proactively creates a feeling of security. It also monitors children's responses to a critical incident.

This module outlines how to restore a sense of safety in your learning community. This includes the importance of communication in the following ways:

- providing clarity
- encouraging expression
- tuning in and being responsive
- being sensitive
- respecting everyone's needs and wishes.

The module also explores different frameworks and strategies that you can use to support recovery after a critical incident. These include:

- Psychological First Aid
- A framework for supporting resilience and recovery
- Therapeutic storytelling
- Strategies for leading the recovery.

## Responding to a suicide or the impacts of a suicide

**Please note: this section is only in the primary and secondary school streams of the Respond module**

As with any critical incident, a learning community's response to a suicide is a coordinated process aimed at ensuring the immediate and ongoing safety, care and support of children and young people, families and the wider community.

There are some important differences, however – including reducing the risk of social transmission of suicidal thoughts and behaviours. For more information, see Be You's Suicide Prevention and Response resources. Be You Consultants are available to help schools who are affected by a suicide attempt or suicide.

Death by suicide of a learning community member, or a person connected to the community, can be a very upsetting and traumatic event for children and young people, families, educators and the wider community. The death often happens unexpectedly and leaves people with many questions. You and your colleagues will have a range of responses, including shock, confusion, grief and concern for your students and one another.

Your leadership team will manage your early learning service or school's response to the critical incident. However, as trusted members of a support network, you play a critical role in responding sensitively to children, young people and families.

### By completing the Respond module, you will be able to:

- appreciate the importance of responding collaboratively to critical incidents
- understand strategies and frameworks that can support you to respond within your role
- take part in collaborative responses to critical incidents using different approaches
- take steps as an educator to collaboratively respond to the impacts of critical incidents.