



Worcestershire County Council
**Coping with Emergencies
/ Critical Incidents in
Schools**

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Throughout this document reference is made to critical incidents and emergencies, it is difficult to differentiate between the two terms, and they are used interchangeably throughout.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to schools to help them produce tailored and appropriate school emergency plans. It also allows access to Emergency Response Information Cards (ERIC) which may be useful when dealing with an emergency / critical incident. Please download and keep a local copy of this document and any associated documents that may be of use to you. This should include on the school site and at home.

Critical Incidents can be separated into three categories, Level 1, 2 and 3, for examples of these levels please [See A. Critical Incident Levels](#)

On many occasions schools will be able to deal with a level 1 critical incident independently in an effective and self-contained manner without requiring the involvement of any third parties, such as the emergency services, or Worcestershire County Council central teams. Incidents that involve property damage, severe weather, loss of utilities, minor accidents, flu outbreaks, etc. can be effectively managed by a school through the implementation of a well-constructed School Critical Incident / Emergency Plan.

A level 2 or 3 critical Incident may require assistance from external agencies, for example when the incident:

- Constitutes a serious disruption arising with little or no warning,
- Creates significant danger or risk, where staff, students and parents feel unsafe, vulnerable and under stress,
- Is on a scale **beyond** the coping capacity of the school operating under normal conditions.

Your plan should cover procedures for incidents occurring during school hours and outside school hours, including weekends, bank holidays and school holidays. It should also include procedures for dealing with incidents occurring on and off the school site. You may also wish to include in the policy information around advising parents / families of services in the local area that they could use for support following an incident.

Listed below are some of the types of critical incidents that you may experience in your school. Each box links to an Emergency Response Information Card (ERIC). You may wish to complete these with the relevant information for your school, they can act as a helpful simple step by step guide to dealing with the type of incident described.

2. EMERGENCY RESPONSE INFORMATION CARDS (ERIC's)

Critical Incidents

Examples of incidents impacting on schools could include:

ERIC 1
Loss of Utilities

ERIC 2
Bomb threats

ERIC 3
Loss of ICT

ERIC 4
Severe Weather

ERIC 5
Water Escape / Flooding

ERIC 6
Communicable Disease

ERIC 7
Loss of Premises

ERIC 8
Injuries

ERIC 9
Death of Pupil /
Member of Staff

ERIC 10
Chemical
Release/Radioactive
Source Leak

Former Links are currently not connected.

Please see Embedded Document File to view
the ERIC card for the required area.

3. THE EMERGENCY PLAN (Critical Incident Plan)

Schools may wish to use this document to build or review their emergency plan, adapting it to fit the appropriate circumstances and school.

A template emergency plan can be accessed here: [See B. Critical Incident Template.](#)

3.1 The planning process

Preparing for emergencies is an on-going process which involves:

- Risk assessment
- Planning
- Training
- Exercising
- Reviewing

Throughout each stage of this process it may be advisable to consult members of staff and governors to gain their involvement and support.

This document is structured around each of the five bullet points above and the processes will be explained in more detail throughout. Also as a signatory to the WCC SLA a training session will be provided each year to provide more detailed help and guidance on Critical Incident planning and management.

3.2 Emergency Plan Distribution

Once you have created your emergency plan, all staff and governors should have a copy, which can then be referred to during school hours and outside of school hours, including holidays and when on educational visits.

As most emergency plans contain sensitive information (e.g. contact details) it is important to keep them secure. All versions of the plan, including hard copies and electronic version, must be controlled. Hard copies should be locked away when unattended and electronic versions should be password protected.

You should consider keeping a copy of the plan offsite, making sure to keep the document secure but accessible. This could be with a care taker or site manager.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 Guidance

Schools are potentially susceptible to a variety of risks; these vary in severity and likelihood.

Before developing an emergency plan it is useful to consider those risks your school could be particularly vulnerable to. When identifying risks to your school, it may be useful to consider as a starting point, some of the risks contained in the West Mercia Local Resilience Forum Community Risk Register.

Please click on the following link. Once the page loads, click on the West Mercia Local Resilience Forum Community Risk Register link at the bottom of the page:

[WM LRF - Community Risk Register](#)

Please note that an emergency plan should be designed to help the school respond to a variety of incidents onsite, as well as offsite. There is no requirement to develop a separate plan for each risk.

Risks can be assessed based on a combination of the likelihood of an incident occurring and the potential level of impact of that incident should it occur. The combination of these two factors determines the level of risk (e.g. High, Medium or Low).

4.2 Evaluation of Risk – Likelihood and Impact Matrix

The Likelihood is assessed on a continuum ranging from Almost Impossible to Very High, dependant on the degree of probability.

The impact should the risk occur can be assessed by using the consequence criteria. It should be noted that this is a guide only and other considerations may be necessary.

4.3 Risk Assessment Template

In order to complete your risk assessment you may wish to consider using the following template. To access the template please [See C. Risk Register Template](#).

Risk Number	Description	Risk Mitigation (Controls in place)	Risk Level	Officer
1	Loss of Water	Emergency School closure procedure in place	6	Head
2	Loss of Electricity	Emergency School closure procedure in place	6	Head
3	Flooding	School based next to a river, flood defences and monitoring systems are in place	15	Head
4	Etc	Etc	Etc	Etc

5. PLANNING

5.1 Roles and Responsibilities

This section of the plan includes generic roles and responsibilities for staff during an emergency and in the recovery phase. The actions required will depend on the nature of the emergency. It is unlikely that staff would need to implement all of the actions outlined in this section during one incident.

A list of actions for the initial response, on-going response and recovery are included in the roles and responsibilities template. [See B. Critical Incident Template \(Pages 13 to 21\)](#)

The actions can be split up into four sections:

- 5.1.1 Initial Response
- 5.1.2 On-going Response
- 5.1.3 Recovery
- 5.1.4 Psychological Support

Actions taken during the response to an emergency can have a direct impact on the recovery phase. When responding to an incident the wellbeing and safety of pupils, parents / carers and staff must be the number one priority.

5.1.1 Initial Response

During the initial response stage you are advised to assess the situation and establish a basic overview of the incident, consider if evacuation is required (this may not be appropriate in all circumstances), attend to any casualties, administering first aid as necessary and make sure that immediate action is taken to safeguard young people, staff and visitors.

5.1.2 On-going Response

An on-going response is the action that should be taken once the initial response of the incident has taken place and any immediate threat is under control. During this stage you should consider who else may need to be involved in the response, for example school transport.

The management of information at this stage is imperative this includes information to parents / carers and you should also check that everyone who should have been notified of the incident has been informed.

5.1.3 Recovery

Once the response has finished all those who were originally notified of the incident should be informed. A recovery strategy should now be established. Check what agreements you have in place to support the organisation of remedial work to property. As part of the SLA with WCC post incident support to pupils and staff is available if required.

The recovery phase may last for a significant period of time. You may wish to break down the recovery phase into short, medium and long term objectives.

Reconstruction work, formal inquiries or police investigations into an incident will require the co-operation and support of school staff, pupils and parents / carers. You may also wish to consider advising parents and families of services in your local area that they could use for support following an incident.

5.1.4 Psychological Support

While critical incidents vary, they will almost inevitably disrupt school functioning to some degree and at such times it may be appropriate for a school to request Psychological Support.

In all cases, Psychological support for schools following a critical incident is designed to be flexible and responsive to the school's needs and aims to support, facilitate and empower the Head teacher and school staff to manage the incident effectively.

The Psychology Service can provide both direct and indirect support (as appropriate) if there are pupils or staff who have witnessed or been directly involved in a serious or fatal incident.

The intervention of the Psychological Support following a critical incident should be part of the school's planned management of a major incident incorporating systematic intervention and support, as appropriate.

See D. Psychological Support

5.2 Emergency Management Team

As part of your Emergency plan you should appoint an Emergency Management Team (EMT). The Headteacher will usually take the overall responsibility for co-ordinating the response to an emergency, but if this is not appropriate a pre-arranged nominee should be identified and appropriately trained to undertake this role.

Unless the incident is minor it will be difficult for the Headteacher to implement all the actions required on behalf of the school. The EMT should be established at the onset of an incident, which can then assist the Headteacher in managing the response.

You should aim to cover the following roles within the EMT:

- Co-ordination (Usually the Headteacher)
- Business continuity
- Communications / Media Management
- Log Keeping
- Resources
- Welfare

The EMT could be made up of representatives from the following school employees:

- site managers,
- business managers,
- teachers and
- office staff.

You should also aim to have at least two members of staff assigned to each role, a lead and a deputy.

Use your judgment to increase or reduce the size of an EMT depending on the scale of the incident you are dealing with.

It is also useful to pre-designate a venue for the EMT to meet during an incident. Ideally this should have access to telephones and should have enough room to incorporate the EMT and responders (e.g. personnel from the emergency services or local authority). **It is crucial that staff dealing with an incident are aware of telephone numbers being used to coordinate response.**

Staff not within the EMT still have a crucial role in the response to an emergency, as their presence will be needed to reassure pupils and minimise disruption to the school routine.

5.3 Resources

5.3.1 Grab Bag

You may also wish to consider putting together a grab bag for use in an emergency. The types of items you may wish to include in a grab bag are as follows:

- Your Emergency Plan
- First Aid Kit
- Torch
- Two Way Radios
- Batteries
- Whistle
- Loud Hailer

For a full list of the contents of a grab bag [See – E. Contents of a Grab Bag.](#)

5.3.2. Log Keeping

During an incident it is **vital** that you maintain an incident log. Within this log, staff should record decisions made, actions taken, significant conversations and any other important information pertinent to the incident. You may be asked to provide copies of the records that you keep after the incident, for example as part of a lessons learned exercise. Any emergency affecting a school may afterwards become the subject of a detailed inquiry. It is important that accurate written records are kept and that no piece of information related to the response is lost. Information related to the incident should be copied, retained and archived for future reference.

When distributing the plan it is recommended that staff are provided with a log book. Staff should keep this alongside their copy of the plan to ensure it is readily available.

Log Book Guidelines and a template are available. [See – F. WCC Log Keeping.](#)

5.4 Emergency Plan (Critical Incident Plan)

Your emergency plan can be made up of various sections. It should include information on key contact details, including your Emergency Management Team and their actions during response and recovery, information regarding your school site, including utility company details and, various templates that can be used on notification of an incident.

For a template of an emergency plan please click [See B. Critical Incident Template](#).

5.4.1 Contact Details

The first section of your plan should include details about your establishment and key contact information. Knowing who to contact and being able to contact them is fundamental in responding to an incident successfully. The contact list should include, but is not limited to:

- Staff and Governors
- Local Authority contacts
- Other organisations, e.g. Police, Fire, Environment Agency
- Local Radio Stations
- A blank template to record any other contacts for use during the incident

5.4.2 Activation and Initial Actions

Potentially any member of staff could be notified of an incident so it is important that all employees are aware of the plan and a copy is made readily available, for example near the telephone in the school office.

When an incident occurs the priority is the safety and welfare of pupils, parents / carers, visitors and staff. Alert the emergency services if necessary. Other organisations, such as the local authority, should then be informed as appropriate.

Please note that some emergencies may affect the local community but not the school directly. In such instances it might be suitable to activate certain aspects of the plan, for example post incident support to help those affected.

Please remember that throughout the response to an incident staff should maintain an incident log of everything that has happened.

[See B. Critical Incident Template \(Page 11 to 14\)](#)

5.4.3 Off-site / Educational Visits

There are various roles that need to be assigned to staff members when planning Education visits. These are:

- Educational Visits Co-ordinator
- Educational Visits Leader
- Assistant Leader

For more information on these roles please visit the [Outdoor Education Advisors Panel](#) website which provides national guidance.

Leaders of educational visits have a legal duty of care for the people under their charge. Schools are required to have procedures in place for educational visits and staff should refer to these arrangements when planning an event.

Although various roles and responsibilities are assigned to the leader, some of these actions are likely to be delegated to other members of staff on the visit.

Prior to an educational visit at least one member of staff, back at the school, should be identified who can be contacted in the event of an emergency on the trip. This person must be adequately prepared to support the educational visit leader and have access to documentation related to the trip (for example a list of all attendees, contact details for the group and parents/carers)

It is important to ensure these arrangements will work outside of school hours and during holidays if activities are taking place at these times. A back-up contact should also be identified.

Once notified of a critical incident the member of staff should initiate the Emergency Contact Protocol, where the planned cascade of information and action, as set out in the establishment's critical incident plan, takes place. They should ensure that they:

- Make every effort to seek alternative and additional telephone lines.
- Restrict access to telephones, including mobile phones, and to other outside contacts, including the media and press.
- Contact the employer's designated Lead Officer contact point, details of the incident and also the current emergency contact telephone number at the location.
- Ensure that an appropriate adult is accessible by telephone.

See G. Offsite Emergency or Critical Incident Guidance

6. TRAINING

School Employees have many demands on their time but it is **vital** that staff and governors are aware of their roles when responding to an incident. **Training events/ simulation exercises provide an excellent opportunity for staff to become acquainted with emergency procedures and discuss any queries or concerns they may have. WCC may be able to assist in organising such events, if you require advice, guidance or assistance please contact Libby Tassell on 01905 766178**

The amount of training staff and governors require will vary depending upon the role, however, all employees should have a general overview of the schools emergency procedures.

Training records of staff and governors should be maintained both for audit purposes and to ensure their training is kept up to date.

6.1 Types of Training

For information and bookings for the courses below please contact 01905 723259 This can include Delivery, Involving Pupils and Raising awareness with parent/carers.

Staff can be trained in a variety of ways, please [See H Training document including H1 and H2 \(PowerPoint presentations\)](#) for more information regarding:

- The types of training,
- Delivery including resources,
- Involving pupils
- Raising awareness with parents/carers.

6.1.1 Courses that are available through Worcestershire County Council for schools include:

- Visit Leader Training (VLT)
- Educational Visit Coordinator training (EVC)
- Emergency Contact Training (ECT) - for nominated Emergency Contacts but is also useful for all SMT's, Education Visit Co-ordinators, Governors and Visit Leaders

6.1.2 Key things staff need to know:

- Content of Emergency plan/ ERIC Cards
- Location of Grab bag
- Location of first aid kit
- Location of key telephone numbers

Staff may also benefit from:

- First Aid Training – Learning and Development
- Media Training
- Fire & Safety Training
- Health and Safety Training

7. EXERCISING

Emergency Plans are part of a cycle, a plan is written, training is then provided to ensure everyone understands roles and procedures and once this is achieved the plan is tested with an exercise.

The purpose of an exercise is to validate procedures documented within an emergency plan. Although they cannot fully replicate the pressure of a real incident, exercises can help to reinforce training, give confidence to staff that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to respond to an emergency and increase the likelihood of procedures working in practice.

They are also particularly adept at highlighting areas of the response which may initially have been overlooked when developing the plan.

7.1 Types of Exercise

The types of exercise that can be included are:

- Discussion-based exercises
- Table-top exercise including resources
- Live exercises

For more information on exercises please [See I Exercises](#)

8. REVIEWING

8.1 Review

An emergency plan needs to be reviewed on a regular basis in order for it to remain effective. Contact details will need reviewing regularly. It is recommended that these are updated at least annually.

Staff, governors, extended services, pupils and parents / carers should also be encouraged to notify the school whenever their contact details have changed.

Grab bags should also be audited annually and after any equipment has been used. An audit template is available [See – E. Contents of a Grab Bag](#).

8.2 Debriefs / Lessons Learned

It is particularly important to identify lessons from an exercise or incident. The best method of doing this is by asking staff and governors to attend a debrief.

A debrief should aim to identify:

- Aspects of the response which worked particularly well.
- Aspects of the response which could have been improved.
- Improvements that should be made to the school emergency plan.
- Additional training needs for staff.

A debrief may take place immediately after an exercise or some time afterwards, when participants have had time to reflect on what happened.

Although it may not be appropriate to invite pupils and parents / carers to a debrief you may wish to speak to these people beforehand to gain their views on the response and mention any issues in the debrief on their behalf.

It is important that information and suggestions for improvement are captured during a debrief or review. It might be appropriate to devise an action plan which includes any suggested amendments that need to be made to the plan.

8.3 Redistributing the plan

Ideally, staff and governors should be given a chance to consult on the plan before any new versions are distributed. A process of version control should also be instigated to ensure only the most up-to-date version of the plan is available.

One hard copy of the previous version should be archived and all others destroyed (preferably shredded). Similarly, one electronic version should be archived and all others deleted (including those on encrypted memory sticks). Similar arrangements should also be put in place for public versions of the plan.