



Coping with a Crisis at Academy

**Advice and Guidance for Head of Academy,
Teachers and Governing Bodies**
(For use in conjunction with the
Business Continuity Plan for Academy Document)

Introduction

There are two documents that give academies guidance when they are coping with a crisis.

- The Academy Business Continuity Plan
- Coping with a Crisis at Academy

The following paragraphs outline which of the two documents would be the most appropriate to use in the circumstances.

If your incident threatens or continues to threaten personnel, premises or the operational structure of the academy and requires special measures to be taken to restore a normal service, the academy would be advised to use the **Academy's Business Continuity Plan** as a framework (rather than this document). Examples might be where the premises are affected or where there are multiple casualties.

If you are unable to locate the **Academy's Business Continuity Plan** and your crisis is of the nature above, **contact 07659 599209** for the Director on Call. This will activate support from the County Council, including notifying all relevant people who will attend the site as a matter of urgency, as necessary, including Health and Safety Advisors and Property Consultants. In the unlikely event that contact cannot be made with the Director on Call, contact the Staffordshire Civil Contingencies Unit's Duty Officer. This can be done by calling **08451 213322**. This number will put you through to Fire Control. Please ask Fire Control to page the CCU Duty Officer leaving an appropriate message.

If your incident relates to the management of a death or serious injury of a pupil or member of academy staff, but does not threaten the wider functioning of the academy, then **Coping with a Crisis at Academy** provides the appropriate framework.

This Coping with a Crisis document contains more detailed advice and guidance to support the Academy Business Continuity Plan with particular reference to the needs of staff, pupils and parents. Issues concerning premises are not covered in this document.

If in doubt use the Academy's Business Continuity Plan document which includes references to this Coping with a Crisis at Academy document.

Developing a Contingency Plan in advance

Best practice suggests that, in the event of a critical incident, academies are better prepared if they have developed a contingency plan for future use. Information and guidance to support this are found in the Appendix.

It is recommended that academies discuss and update their contingency plans on a regular basis (see recommendations in The Business Contingency Plan for Academies).

UNDER REVIEW

COPING WITH A CRISIS WITH REFERENCE TO THE NEEDS OF STAFF, PUPILS AND PARENTS

Where applicable, the corresponding reference numbers on the Academy's Business Continuity Plan (BCP) are cross-referenced.

IMMEDIATE ACTION

1. Obtain and collate information (BCP 1.1)

When a crisis occurs, the first task is to obtain accurate information and to relay it to senior management within the academy. In many cases, 'information' will be widely available on social websites: this may include inaccuracies and speculation. It is the Academy's role to work with the facts as they become known.

Details may be unclear for many hours, but there is still a need to convey as much accurate information as possible.

2. Inform Support Contacts. (BCP 1:10, 1:11, 2:4, 2:5)

Contact the County Improvement Manager for the academy, who will, if required, inform the District Senior Educational Psychologist to initiate critical incident support.

Contact the Corporate Communications Department (see Appendix for contact numbers).

Inform the chair of the Academy Council

3. Nominate and brief the academy critical incident management team (BCP 2:2)

As soon as an incident is confirmed, the senior management team needs to meet to decide their strategies. This group should appoint a small team (for example the Head of Academy, Head of Pastoral Care and County Improvement Manager), relieve them of their duties, and allow them to manage the crisis over the next few hours.

4. Start the incident log (BCP1:4)

See Appendix for log sheet.

5. Identify an incident management room and dedicated phone line (BCP 2:2)

In the event of a tragedy, the academy is likely be inundated with telephone calls. This means that people will need to staff the academy phone line. Dealing with distressed and worried enquirers, especially when there is uncertainty or bad news, can be a stressful task.

Personnel answering the phones should keep notes and have them checked against appropriate records, so that there is certainty about who has phoned in and who still needs to be contacted.

Where there has been an accident outside the academy, the party leader needs to have an emergency number on which to make contact with senior management back at academy or at their homes. If possible, this should be different from the regular academy number.

Senior academy management can then also use this different line or mobile number to maintain contact with the **Staffordshire LA staff**. This will enable the academy line to continue to be used for routine academy business and for responding to the parents and press who are trying to phone in.

6. Consult with the District Senior Educational Psychologist (BCP 1:10)

The Educational Psychology Service offers support and advice to academies in such situations. It does not usually include working with individual pupils because, at this stage, pupils need to be supported by adults they already know and trust.

Different levels of support are available depending on the requirements of the academy.

Examples of the types of support available are:

- Telephone discussion of the incident, which may include advice on the management of practical and emotional issues.
- An EP visit to the academy to listen to the immediate concerns and to support the academy in planning its response. The support for planning may include the following examples:
 - a) Advice on sharing information with the pupils
 - b) Information about the development of the understanding of death
 - c) Information about trauma
 - d) Contributing to the academy action plan, for example by providing input to a staff meeting

7. Contact families whose children/next of kin are involved

The families of the young people caught in a tragedy will need full and accurate information. Parents need to be contacted promptly, but the speed

will depend upon the nature and scale of the incident. This may be done in person or may have to be undertaken by telephone.

It is difficult, in this document, to give very specific advice on the best way to pass on distressing information, because the nature of the crisis will vary. However, the following general suggestions will help to ensure that the information is passed on as effectively and sensitively as possible:

- a) Prepare a brief for the member of staff making the contact, perhaps suggesting that they rehearse the message first

- b) Take careful note of those parents who still need to be informed so that those who already know are not contacted again
- c) Check that the parents are not left alone in distress, perhaps making suggestions for making contact with relatives or neighbours
- d) Give useful phone numbers, either for support or for more information. For example, the emergency disaster number or the hospital number

8. Inform teaching and support staff (BCP 2:3 2:10 2:12)

All staff should be informed as soon as possible, preferably at a specially convened staff meeting. It is essential that both teaching staff and ancillary staff share the same information so that rumours do not start to circulate.

Some members of staff will need support and advice at this stage. This should be managed by the academy critical incident management team (in consultation with the Educational Psychology Service).

9. Dealing with the media (BCP 2:8)

In a crisis, media relations are especially important. In most circumstances it is recommended that the Staffordshire Corporate Communications Department is contacted for advice (see appendix for contact telephone numbers). One of the tasks of academy must be to protect children, parents and staff from the glare of publicity, particularly during the first week or so. While the media can help inform the public responsibly, it can also be intrusive at times of stress and personal grief.

A senior person on the academy staff, working alongside the County Improvement Manager (and the Corporate Communications Department if appropriate), should be nominated as press officer to deal with the media. It is not advisable to permit press and television on to the academy premises nor to give them unsupervised access to staff or children.

All enquiries should be directed to and through the Corporate Communications Department, who will be able to advise on the appropriate information that can be shared with the press. They can arrange briefing sessions with the press if necessary. If the press are aware of these arrangements, they may be less inclined to crowd the academy gates or try to interview individual pupils, staff or parents.

While factual information may be given to the press, the privacy of staff, young people and their families should be maintained. Pupils should only be interviewed with the expressed permission of their parents or carers.

Members of staff dealing directly with families involved in the crisis should not be asked to take on the task of dealing with the press.

10. Inform pupils (BCP 2:14)

Pupils should be told simply and clearly what has happened. It is recommended that this is done in the smallest groups possible, for example in classes or tutor groups. Their questions should be answered as straightforwardly as possible. Staff who undertake this task should be asked to pass on facts only and never to speculate on the causes of the crisis or its

consequences. It may be helpful to prepare a fact sheet for staff to use. Where questions cannot be answered at the time, this should be acknowledged.

It is important to provide time for discussion and expression of emotion, which will need to be managed sensitively by the adult.

If an academy is to close, children and parents should be told by the end of the academy day, preferably at the same time as parents are told about the incident. Closure should, on the whole, be avoided.

11. Make arrangements for informing other parents (BCP2:3)

Wherever possible, parents of all the other children in the academy who may be affected should be informed that the academy community has experienced a crisis and that their child may be upset.

This might most easily be achieved through a letter sent home with the pupils. The advice of the **Staffordshire Corporate Communications Department** concerning the appropriate information to share with the press and others is likely to be helpful here too.

In some circumstances it may be possible to consult the parents of the pupil or pupils affected.

The Educational Psychology Service will be able to provide example letters.

Other Important Points

Maintain a normal routine

As far as possible the academy's normal routine should be followed. This is to ensure some security in the lives of the pupils at a time of crisis.

Attendance at funerals or burials

People from differing backgrounds and religions have different burial rites. Some may hold funerals within 24 hours of death. There is not always time therefore to prepare staff and pupils for attendance. In this case a member of staff should swiftly make enquiries about the burial customs (for example, if flowers are in order and whether women and men and representatives from the academy – including pupils – would be welcome).

MEDIUM TERM ACTION (1 – 3 DAYS)

1. Organise update of information

Ensure that up to date information is provided to all those concerned as appropriate.

2. Arrange opportunities for support

After a critical incident, staff and pupils may feel shocked and numb: many will feel a strong need to talk. The whole academy is often involved even though some sectors may be more affected than others.

Staff and pupils will need an opportunity to express their emotional reactions. Current research shows that the best people to provide support for the children and young people are the adults that the children and young people already know and trust.

At a time of crisis there may be many offers of help from outside the academy. It may be difficult to know when to say 'yes' and when to say 'no' and with whom to work. The head of academy has legal responsibility for what happens to the pupils in academy. When the head of academy invites help and advice from professionals outside, this should be done by creating a partnership.

3. Develop a plan for responding to the feelings and reactions of the academy community (BCP 2:6)

3:1 Staff

After a crisis, staff need to know that it is natural to want to talk about the incident and to share their feelings. Many will need space and time to talk before being able to focus on other things. A staff meeting could be organised to talk and share responses

3:2 Pupils (BCP 3:4)

After a disaster many pupils may need to talk about their experiences. Initially adults should try to listen, even though it might be disruptive to the task in hand. After a few days the young people should be encouraged to talk to a designated member of staff, although the young people themselves should obviously have some say in the choice of the listener. As always, it is important to observe and to **listen** to the child or young person. Adults should try not to be too intrusive. On the other hand experience has shown that children or young people will not talk about their innermost feelings unless they are given strong signals that it is safe to do so.

Opportunities for pupils to express their feelings need to be organised: some children may find it helpful to show their feelings through drawing and writing.

Some children and young people may express their distress through challenging behaviour.

For most pupils continuing to follow the routine of the classroom provides some security in a time of great stress. For the small minority of pupils who are not able to cope in the lessons, a room could be put aside for the pupils to go to: it might have drawing and writing materials available for the pupils to use. This room needs to be supervised by sensitive and responsive

adults. It is important to ensure that staff supervising this room and providing support for the pupils, receive the support they need too.

4. Ensure that high risk pupils and staff have been identified and are being monitored (BCP 3:4)

Some members of the community will be vulnerable because of their relationship to individuals who were involved in the crisis. Others may be reminded of incidents in their life that were similar or have been very difficult to deal with. There is great variation in the way that children, young people and adults respond to crises. Some people that one might predict would need support may have good internal resources and/or support outside the academy.

Check pupils and staff likely to be affected and provide support for individuals who identify themselves. If possible ascertain the availability of support at home. Keep a record of individuals and regularly monitor how they are progressing.

LONG TERM ACTION

1. Follow up actions agreed

It is important that the Academy Critical Incident Team follows through all the actions agreed and clearly communicates how these are progressing to everyone in the academy. This will give the community a good sense of security and support.

2. Ensure a return to academy routines as soon as possible

This is essential to provide the security pupils will need at this time. This does not mean that the expression of emotion is not allowed, but rather that it is contained by the clear frameworks within the academy organisation.

Tragedies can bring people together. In some academies the experience can be so profound that staff want to retain the sense of community that the event has generated. Academies should remember that the effects of a crisis can reverberate for several years.

It is important that new staff, and staff new to the children identified as vulnerable, are briefed on the most helpful way of continuing to offer support and regularly monitor how they are.

3. Identify appropriate support

Academy staff identified as having responsibility for the monitoring of specific children and young people affected by the crisis, need to check that these children and young people are progressing.

If there are concerns, the children and young people, if asked, may be able to identify the type of support in academy that would be helpful to them. For example, some young children may need their teachers to encourage other children to play with them, where their original friendships have been affected by the crisis.

4. Organise long term counselling as necessary

Children and young people will need time to come to terms with the impact of the crisis. However, in time, most children and young people will make progress towards their normality before the crisis. Children and young people who are not starting to make this progress may need to be referred to specialist counsellors. If there is any doubt about particular individuals then the academy Educational Psychologist or other outside support agencies could be consulted.

Agencies that can provide this counselling are medical services, accessed through the local GPs, or charities such as those listed in the contact list at the end of the document. Counselling for academy staff is also available through the [Staffordshire staff counselling](#) service also listed in the Appendix.

5. Consider the issue of memorials and anniversaries

It is often helpful to mark the loss of members of the academy community with a memorial service as well as a symbol such as the planting of a tree or the purchasing of a special bench.

The memorial service could include staff and pupils' writing, poems and art and also the individual's favourite hymns for example.

It is very important to liaise closely with the family/families to ensure they are happy with all the memorial arrangements and are included if they wish to be.

In the case of a death by suicide it is recommended that the advice of the Educational Psychology Service is sought.

Anniversaries are often difficult times. It is better if decisions about how to treat anniversaries are made collectively in good time before the anniversary itself. These decisions could include an annual memorial prize; the planning of a special garden that blooms at the appropriate time; a commemorative assembly or a concert. Again, decisions need to take account of the wishes and feelings of the family/families.

Acknowledgements

This document is an amended version of the Staffordshire Pupil and Student Services document 'Coping with a Crisis at School' written by Vincent McDonnell in July 1997. It was amended following consultation with Head teachers in July 2001

In 2012-2013, it was updated to align with Staffordshire's document - 'Business Continuity Plan for Schools'. I am indebted to Julia Anderson (County Manager for Educational Psychology), Sally Williams (District Senior Educational Psychologist) and the Staffordshire Educational Psychology Service Critical Incident Lead EP team for help with this task

Paula Hodson
District Senior Educational Psychologist
March 2013

APPENDIX

WHO TO INFORM

If your incident threatens personnel, premises or the operational structure of the academy and requires special measures to be taken to restore a normal service the academy would be advised to use the Business Continuity Plan as a framework instead.

If you are unable to locate the Business Continuity Plan and your crisis is of the nature above, contact 07659 599209 for the Director on Call. In the unlikely event that contact cannot be made with the Director on Call, contact the Staffordshire Civil Contingencies Unit's Duty Officer. This can be done by calling 08451 213322. This number will put you through to Fire Control. Please ask Fire Control to page the CCU Duty Officer leaving an appropriate message.

For other incidents

1. IN OFFICE HOURS:

When an academy experiences a crisis, they need to contact their County Improvement Manager (see numbers below).

The County Improvement Manager will inform the Educational Psychology Service (and the Corporate Communications Department and the Director on Duty if they feel this is appropriate).

2. OUT OF HOURS

In serious situations An academy needs to inform the Corporate Communications Department (see number below).

The Corporate Communications Department will be able to advise the academy on contact with the press issues, which may be urgent.

The Corporate Communications Department will also contact the Director on Duty and the Educational Psychology Department where this is felt to be appropriate

1. During Office Hours Academies to Contact	
Their County Improvement Manager	Staffordshire: Russell Sheldon 07946 411441

The County Improvement Manager then informs:	
Senior Educational Psychologist:	Jim Matthews 01785 356841/356830

Or if unavailable:	Stafford/South Staffs District:
County Manager Educational Psychology Service	Julia Anderson 01785 278964

2. Out of hours, in serious situations, academy to contact	
Corporate Communications Team (who will contact others as appropriate)	Out of Office Hours 01785 895050

List of Potentially Useful Phone Contacts - updated February 2013

Charity	Area of Work	Phone Numbers
Child Death Helpline www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk	A service staffed by bereaved parental volunteers, with professional support, for all those affected by the death of a child	Freephone 0800 282986 (Every evening 7.00 pm to 10.00 pm and week day mornings)
Winston's Wish www.winstonswish.org.uk/	National Charity providing a helpline for anyone caring for a child coping with death or serious illness. Provides individual child and family support, in some circumstances, where the bereavement is through suicide, murder or manslaughter	08452 030405 Mon-Fri 9.00 am to 5.00 pm
Cruse Bereavement Care www.cruse.org.uk	National charity providing a telephone helpline, a useful website and face to face support where there is a local branch	0844 477 9400
Website for young people (12 years upwards) www.rd4u.org.uk	Young Person's Helpline Burton on Trent Branch Offers support for children Lichfield Branch	0808 808 1677 01283 593167 (Tues and Wed 9.00am to 1.30pm Thurs 8.30am to 9.30am) 01543 433479
Eclipse, Stafford	A child bereavement service based in Stafford, that seeks to support children and young people, aged 5 to 18, usually in their academy	01785 660800
Dove Service in Hanley, Stoke on Trent	For North Staffordshire or people who can reach Hanley. For anyone	01782 683155/ 01782 683153

	affected by bereavement, significant loss, or a life-changing illness, at any time in their lives The Dove Service Is able to provide support for children and those with learning disabilities	
Staffordshire Staff Counselling Service		01785 276284

UNDER REVIEW

Developing a Contingency Plan in advance

Academies that have considered in advance how they would respond to a critical incident will be much better able to cope. Having an agreed plan in place will enable an academy to reference decisions already made about practical arrangements. The academy will then be able to focus on the specific requirements of the particular critical incident.

Moreover, as with many academy policies and plans, having an opportunity to discuss with colleagues the issues involved and agree the best options for their academy, is very important in enabling staff to understand and support the plan.

The Business Contingency Plan document suggests planning for the steps the academy will take in terms of actions needed immediately, within the first twenty four hours, medium term and post incident. It also includes templates allowing academies to compile a telephone list of people that the academy may need to contact and the names of the staff nominated to take particular actions for example. Academies need to maintain an up to date list for all their pupils and staff of next of kin and contact details. Staff need to know where to find this list

This Coping with a Crisis document also includes suggestions that, if discussed in advance, would be easier to implement: agreed decisions made could then be included in the plan. The appendix at the end of the document includes useful telephone numbers to consider for the plan.

It is recommended therefore that academies discuss and record their plans on regular basis (see recommendations in The Business Contingency Plan for Academy).

RATIFIED BY CHAIR OF INTERIM EXECUTIVE BOARD

DATE ...16th May 2013

UPDATED 29TH JUNE 2015

RATIFIED BY ACADEMY COUNCIL

DATE.....