



Vancouver Island West School District 84  
**SCHOOL CRISIS ACTION PLAN**

**RATIONALE**

The school Crisis Action Plan (SCAP) is a guide for action by District administration, principals, teachers and counsellors in the event of a crisis such as suicide, sudden death, dying, and loss of a person significant to the school community, a disaster, a tragic accident, or a violent encounter.

In order to deal effectively with a crisis a well-organized plan needs to be prepared in advance. After consideration of this plan, response personnel should be able to plan and implement an effective response procedure. Each situation will be unique and change to the approach, as outlined here, is likely to occur. Operational changes to this plan should be made at the initial coordinating meeting so that everyone is aware of the revisions and roles are clearly defined.

The key elements for an effective response procedure include well-trained personnel, effective communication procedures, a clear collaborative plan and a coordinated response team. All members of a response team should have a good working knowledge of the procedures outlined in this plan.

## **RESPONDING TO A CRISIS – DESCRIPTION**

### **Preparation:**

If it is determined that it is necessary, the Superintendent will discuss the situation with the Principal and, if necessary, will contact and form the External Response Team. The School Principal, or designate, will commence the preparations for the On Site Response Team Coordination Meeting.

The Superintendent's office will coordinate all communications with local media and ensure that affected schools have teachers on call on site if required.

The Superintendent can designate the Principal of Special Education, Student Services and Technology or designate to act for the Superintendent when time and distance do not permit him/her to be present when needed.

### **Response:**

The School Principal, or designate, convenes a coordination meeting which brings together the school-based and External Response Team members. The School Principal also ensures that TTOC's and/or Non-Certified Persons on Call are on site if required.

At the Coordination Meeting, details of the response plan will be worked out. The three key role areas (**ADMINISTRATION, COORDINATION, COUNSELLING**) will be reviewed and appropriate personnel will be identified to assume these roles. Once roles are determined, those in charge of the key role areas will begin implementing the plan.

As part of the implementation, the School Principal, or designate, will convene a staff meeting to:

1. Provide the staff with accurate information.
2. Outline the response plan.
3. Provide teacher packages.
4. Address staff concerns and questions.

### **Follow Up:**

Ongoing contact should occur between the school and the Superintendent's office to assure the accuracy of information and to coordinate ongoing support.

The Superintendent, or the Principal of Special Education, Student Services and Technology, or designate, will call a meeting of the response team to review the day's events and to develop follow up plans. This team may also consider whether or not a wider community response is required, especially if the student participated in community activities.

The School Principal, or designate, will convene a follow-up staff meeting to:

1. Provide any new information.
2. Review the response procedure.
3. Assess the mental health of all staff members.

The Superintendent, or designate, will schedule debriefing sessions for response team members. This will typically occur between 24 to 72 hours after the initial implementation.

Depending on the intensity of the situation, a follow up response plan may be needed. When it appears that the response procedure has been completed, documentation will be completed and the response procedure will come to an end.

## **PHASE ONE: PREPARATION**

### **Step 1 – Gather Information:**

**Who?** Principal or designate.

**Why?** To prepare for making a decision.

**What?** Information to gather prior to contacting the Superintendent or designate.

Prior to contacting the Superintendent, collect the following information:

- A copy of the current edition of the "School Crisis Action Plan"
- A phone number where you can be reached over the next several hours

Be prepared to address the following:

1. What type of incident occurred (eg. suicide, serious accident, sudden death)?
2. Have you discussed the situation with the family members?
3. Did the incident occur on School District property?
4. Were the police, emergency services, and/or coroner involved?
5. How many students do you estimate will be directly impacted by the event?
6. How many staff members do you estimate will be directly affected by the event?
7. Have members of the media contacted or attempted to contact you about this event?
8. Do you believe the School Crisis Action Plan should be deployed?

### **Step 2 – Contact Key Personnel:**

**Who?** Principal or designate

**Why?** To commence activation of the SCAP

**What?** Whenever the SCAP is implemented, the following must be contacted immediately:

Number 1: Contact the Superintendent. The Superintendent will be responsible for contacting the Principal of Special Education, Student Learning and Technology, or designate.

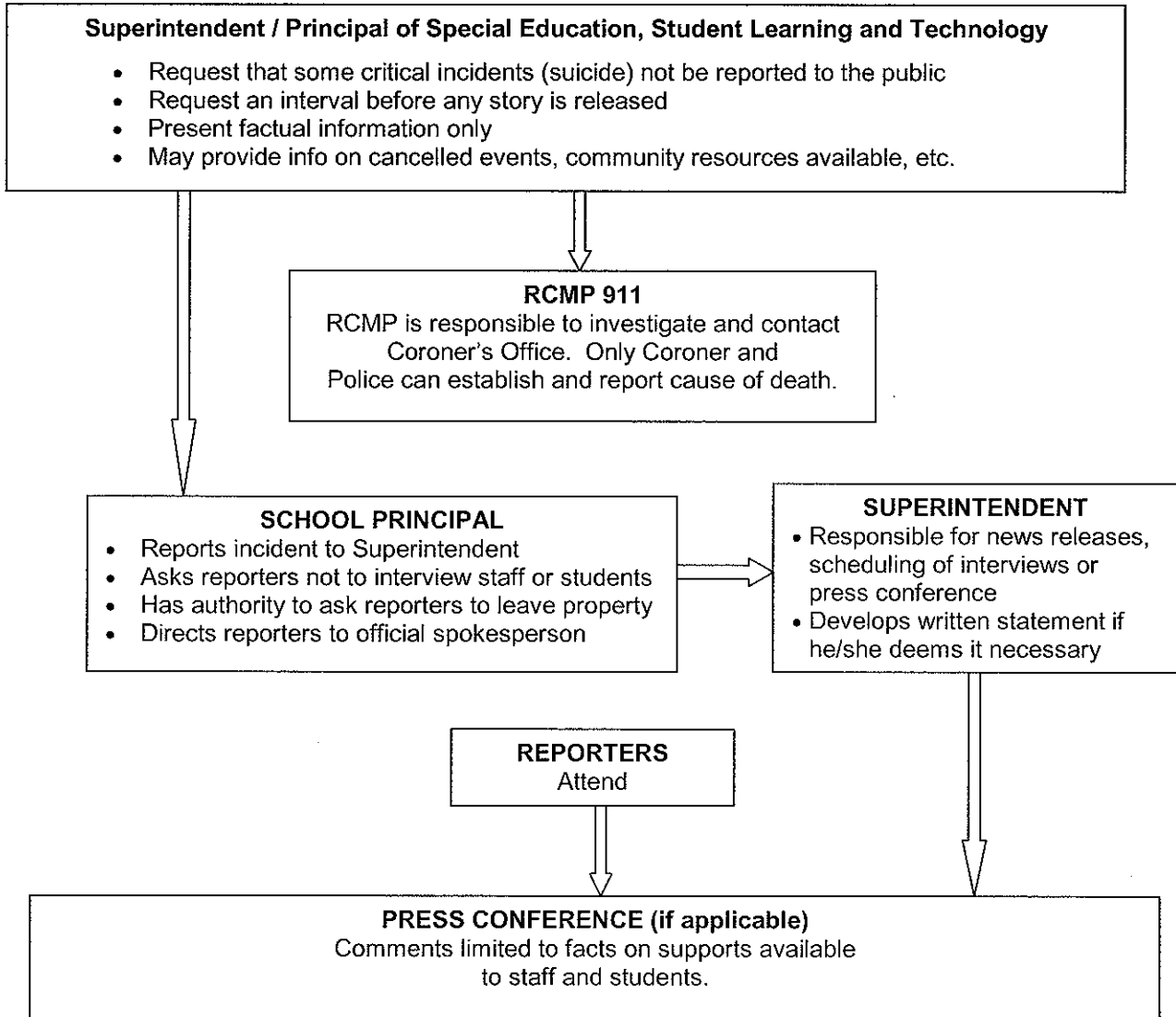
Number 2: In the event that the Superintendent is unavailable, contact the Principal of Special Education, Student Learning and Technology.

**Step 3 – Deal with the Media:**

**Who?** Superintendent or Principal of Special Education, Student Learning and Technology.

**Why?** To address the expectations of the media.

**What?** The following depicts a procedure that will be used to deal with the media:



### Step 3 – Deal with the Media:

#### Description:

**It must be understood that ONLY the Coroner and the RCMP can establish and report the official cause of death.** The School District is not at liberty to take either of these actions. In the case of a suicide by the student, **the Coroner will be requested to make an immediate statement, which indicates that the death was a “sudden death” or that the death “appears to be a suicide”.**

1. In the event of a crisis, the **School Principal shall immediately contact** the Superintendent and the Principal of Special Education, Student Learning and Technology (if designated). An attempt will be made to effect the School Crisis Action Plan within 30 minutes of the event.
2. The Superintendent or his delegate will contact the **RCMP for an official statement**. Following the receipt of that statement, the Superintendent or designate may contact the senior news editor of the respective media outlets and will inform the editor of the contents of the statement.
3. If any media outlet deems that the story has to be told, the School District **will be proactive** in releasing information authorized by the Coroner. The School District must comply with the **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act**.
4. The District will have **ONE SPOKESPERSON** - the Superintendent or a delegate.
5. The Spokesperson, in working with the media, **will remind the media of the danger of sensationalizing teen suicide**, and will refer reports to their senior editors for confirmation of their company's policy with regard to teen suicide. The spokesperson will formally request that the story **not be reported to the public**.
6. The Spokesman will request that **an interval** be allowed before the story breaks. This will allow time for the school family to be informed and the crisis plan activated.
7. The Superintendent or designate may or may not be dispatched to the site, but will facilitate the issuing of news releases and the scheduling of interviews or press conferences. In this regard, consideration should be given to the differing agendas and deadlines of each media service.
8. If a School Principal is contacted by a reporter, either by phone or at the school site, the School Principal **shall direct the reporter** to the Superintendent or designate who will be on site or available to the School Board Office. The Principal shall request reporters **not interview staff members and students** (before a student may be interviewed, permission is required preferably in writing, from a parent or guardian). **The School Principal has the authority to request that reporters leave the school property.**
9. If deemed necessary, a **written statement** might be developed and released by the Superintendent. If a suicide occurred on the School District site, a statement might include the date and the name of the site.
10. The statement given to the media, whether in written or verbal form, **will be factual** and not graphic. The focus will be on the steps taken in the development and implementation of the School Crisis Action Plan, local resources supporting the plan, and the manner in which staff and students are coping in a traumatic situation.
11. If the information is not available initially, the Superintendent or designate will inform the media periodically, as soon as the information is available, particularly with regard to community resources.

12. If appropriate, the help of the media should be enlisted in cancelling events at the site and in reporting how community members may find counseling or other support services.
13. As a leader in the community, consideration should be given to the **School Principal** accompanying the Superintendent, or designate, at interviews and press conferences. This is strongly suggested for the media.
14. The School Principal's comments should be limited to facts with regard to the support services available at the school and should focus on what is being done to help students and staff deal with the crisis.

#### **Step 4 – Prepare for On Site Coordination Meeting:**

**Who?** Principal or designate.

**Why?** To be well prepared for the onsite coordination meeting.

**What?** The School Principal or designate should complete the following tasks prior to the coordination meeting:

1. Contact the school counsellor to overview the situation and to direct them to attend the coordination meeting.
2. Ensure that all staff members are contacted and informed of the incident (if the event occurred outside of regular school hours)
3. Contact the Administrative Assistant(s) to inform them of the situation and to outline the extra demands that will be placed upon them throughout the response process
4. Consider locations for drop-in centers (one for staff and one for students)
5. Make sure that school floor plans are available for all External Response Team members.
6. Consider location for communication center and identify the telephones that could be used by the response team.
7. Contact the PAC President(s) and request help in implementing the response plan.
8. Contact the family or families of those directly involved to access needs and extend support (when appropriate).
9. Develop a preliminary statement of the event to present at the coordination meeting (refer to Appendix B).
10. Make special arrangements to ensure that regular supervision duties will be covered during staff briefing(s),
11. Designate a contact person or persons to brief teachers on call as they arrive and to provide notification to students consistent with practice to be followed in other classrooms.

## PHASE TWO: RESPONSE

### **Step 5 – Conduct Onsite Response Team Coordination Meeting:**

- Who?** Principal, or designate  
**Why?** To develop a comprehensive response plan  
**What?** Establish a planning meeting that includes all Response Team Members

The coordination meeting is a critical component of the response procedure. It is at this meeting a response plan is customized to fit the situation. It will be the first opportunity for members of the school-based team to meet with members of the External Response Team. The School Principal would be the most likely person to facilitate the meeting, but he/she may delegate the role to another team member (e.g. Counsellor or Superintendent, etc.) Following is a suggested agenda for the meeting:

#### COORDINATION MEETING AGENDA

1. Introduce the Response Team Members.
2. Summary of Current Situation.
3. Review of Key Components of a Response Plan and the Procedure of Handling Communications with the Media.
4. Assignment of Roles: Coordination/Administration/Counselling/Communications.
5. Development of the Response Plan. **Considerations:** communication center, drop-in center, staff meeting, document preparation, announcements, student/staff monitoring.
6. Action Summary.

**Step 6 – Establish Key Roles**

- Who?** Superintendent or designate  
**Why?** Ensure that all key roles are covered in the response procedure.  
**What?** Determine who will be responsible for each of the three key role areas.

**KEY ROLES REQUIRED FOR  
THE SCHOOL CRISIS ACTION PLAN**

<p><b>ADMINISTRATION</b></p> <p><b>Who?</b> Usually the School Principal</p> <p><b>What?</b> Responsibilities for overall implementation plan. Administrative details (eg. prime contacts, meetings, Documents, etc.)</p>	<p><b>COMMUNICATION</b></p> <p><b>Who?</b> Superintendent or designate</p> <p><b>What?</b> Responding to Media. Handles all press releases, etc.</p>
<p><b>COUNSELLING</b></p> <p><b>Who?</b> School Counsellors / support services.</p> <p><b>Who?</b> Counsellor available at GRSS; External Response Team: SD 85/72 (2-3 hours away), MCFD, Child &amp; Youth Mental Health, USMA, NTC counselling</p> <p><b>What?</b> Provide direct response services to students and staff, set up drop-in centers, and flag 'at risk' individuals.</p>	<p><b>COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER</b></p> <p><b>Who?</b> Superintendent or designate</p> <p><b>What?</b> Provide assistance to the School Principal in developing and implementing the response procedure, establish communication center, form the External Response Team.</p>



## **Step 7 – Implement the Response Plan: The Initial Staff Meeting**

This meeting typically follows the Coordination Meeting. Careful preparation by the response team will contribute to an effective response plan. The following is a suggested agenda for the initial staff meeting.

### **STAFF MEETING AGENDA**

1. Information Sharing.
2. Go over the response procedure (provide teachers with response package).
  - Outline response personnel and their roles.
  - How to monitor attendance.
  - Procedure for students going to and returning from drop-in center.
  - How to monitor who is in the school.
  - Location of the drop-in center.
  - Document student responses.
  - How to access support.
  - Follow up for students who may be “at risk”.
  - Mention the location of printed materials that may be useful.
  - Encourage staff to follow a normal school day.
  - How to present information to students.
  - Inform staff that materials will be prepared and distributed for students to take home.
3. Schedule next meeting and discuss the need for meetings throughout the day.
4. How to deal with the media
5. Discuss handling of special events that have been scheduled (eg. Field trips, concerts, etc.). If necessary, request assistance from the Communications Officer via public announcements etc.
6. Questions
7. Adjournment

**Step 8 - Conduct a Response Team Follow-up Meeting:**

**Who?** Superintendent or Designate

**Why?** To evaluate the implementation and to monitor response team members

**What?** Facilitate a response team meeting. Following is a suggested agenda.

RESPONSE TEAM FOLLOW-UP MEETING AGENDA

1. Outline agenda and expectations.
2. Allow response team members to present observations.
3. Develop a list of individuals who may require follow-up.
4. Determine who will take action on behalf of "at risk" individuals.
5. Discuss responsibilities at staff follow-up meeting.
6. Set date and time for response team debriefing.
7. Adjourn.

**Step 9 - Conduct a Staff Follow-up Meeting:**

**Who?** School Principal or Designate

**Why?** To review the effectiveness of the response plan and to respond to staff needs.

**What?** Conduct a follow-up staff meeting. Staff attendance is mandatory. Following is a suggested agenda.

**FOLLOW-UP MEETING AGENDA**

1. Information updates.
2. Determine if staff members have access to after-school support.
3. Reminder about attendance and documentation.
4. Review of individuals who may be at risk.
5. Review after-hour contacts.
6. Discuss any community follow-up that may be required.
7. Set next meeting, if necessary.
8. Questions/Concerns.
9. Planning.
10. Adjourn.

## Step 10 - Conduct a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing for Response Team Members:

### Objectives & Sample Questions (if applicable):

Stage 1	Introduction	To introduce intervention, team members, explain the process and set expectations
Stage 2	The Facts	Describe the traumatic event from each participant's perspective in a rational, unemotional, manner. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "Who are you?"</li><li>• "How were you involved?"</li><li>• "What happened?"</li></ul>
Stage 3	Thoughts	To allow participants to describe cognitive reactions and to transition to emotional reactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "What were your first or most prominent thoughts about the incident once you stopped to think about it?"</li></ul>
Stage 4	Reaction	Identify the most traumatic aspects of the event for the participants and to identify emotional reactions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "What was the very worst aspect of this event for you personally?"</li><li>• "If there is one thing you could change about your experience in the event, what would it be?"</li></ul>
Stage 5	Symptoms	Identify personal symptoms of distress and transition back to cognitive level. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "What symptoms or emotional reactions have you experienced?"</li><li>• "What symptoms are you still experiencing?"</li></ul>
Stage 6	Teaching	Educate as to normal reactions and adaptive coping mechanisms, i.e. stress management. Provide cognitive anchor.
Stage 7	Re-entry	Clarify ambiguities and to prepare for termination.

## **Step 11 - Complete Final Documentation and Plan Wrap-Up:**

**Who?** School Principal and Superintendent

**Why?** Develop a written summary of the events and to consider implications for future responses.

**What?** Prepare a clear concise written summary of who was involved and what occurred. Following are questions to consider when preparing the summary.

### **Questions to Consider When Preparing the Summary**

1. What type of incident occurred (eg. suicide, impending death, homicide, etc.)?
2. Where did the incident or incidents occur?
3. How many of your staff and student population were affected by the incident?
4. What procedures were followed in responding to the incident?
5. In what ways did the procedures that were followed benefit those involved?
6. In what ways did the procedures that were followed hinder those involved?
7. What suggestions would you make for future implementations in incidents similar to the one you experienced?