



National
Guidance

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Emergencies and Critical Incidents - Guidance for Establishments

See document [4.1b "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – Overview"](#). This includes definitions of the terms 'Emergency' and 'Critical Incident'.

Most incidents that happen on off-site visits can be dealt with by the visit leadership team. However, sometimes an incident becomes an Emergency, when the visit leadership team needs support from the establishment. Occasionally it becomes a Critical Incident, when the establishment needs support from the employer (or is required to involve the employer).

Roles and Responsibilities

The role of leaders in an Emergency or Critical Incident is addressed in document [4.1c "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – Guidance for Leaders"](#).

In planning how to deal with Emergencies, establishments should be informed by their own capacity and by what level of support can be expected from their employer:

- Establishments which have a separate employer (e.g. Community Schools and academies which are part of a multi-academy trust) must follow any guidance provided by their employer, and should ascertain what level of support they can expect in the event of a Critical Incident.
- Some establishments also have the role of employer (e.g. most Foundation and Independent Schools, some Voluntary Aided schools, stand-alone academies, and many voluntary sector settings). For these establishments, and for those establishments whose employer cannot provide practical support in the event of an incident, there is no practical distinction between Emergencies and Critical Incidents, and they should also follow the guidance in document 4.1e "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – Guidance for Employers".
- Small establishments, and establishments whose employer's capacity to provide support is limited, should consider making arrangements for support in the event of an Emergency or Critical Incident, based upon the types of visit they organise. For examples, clusters of nearby schools could agree in advance to work together to provide mutual support in order to increase their resilience and capacity.

The Emergency Plan

Your establishment should have an Emergency Plan for off-site visits. It should aim to:

- Meet the needs of the group in crisis;
- Meet the needs of the establishment's community - parents, staff, relatives and friends;
- Respond to the needs of other agencies;
- Respond to media demands.

The details of the Emergency Plan should depend upon the types of visit that the establishment organises, on its circumstances and capacity, and on the capacity of your employer and the details in its Critical Incident Plan. Where possible, consult your employer's emergency planning officer when drawing up your Emergency Plan.

Your Emergency Plan should be comprehensive, setting out the roles and responsibilities of all those who may have to contribute to the management of an Emergency. It should explain the roles to be filled rather than assign named staff to a them (as individual staff may be unavailable at the time of the incident). Guidance for each role should allow any suitable staff to pick up the task and be effective.

It should include a clear system to activate it, that is fully understood by all visit leaders and their staff, and is part of the Emergency Procedures for all visits. See the section 'Activating the Emergency Plan' below.

The Emergency Plan should also include details of how to activate the employer's Critical Incident Plan, and/or how to activate other pre-arranged support, if this becomes necessary.

When developing your plan, it is good practice to:

- Recognise that a climate of support and trust among staff will strengthen the response at a time of crisis;
- Devote a staff meeting or part of a staff development session to the plan - this should happen in the initial stages and again once the plan is complete;
- Identify key staff - being involved in an Emergency can be very demanding, and it is important to ensure that the staff selected for this role are competent and able to function and make sound decisions in an unexpected and stressful situation;
- Recognise that any particular member of staff might not be available at the time of an Emergency, or might be limited because of commitments such as childcare;
- Provide appropriate training (see below);
- Develop checklists, crib cards, etc. to support staff during an Emergency;
- Recognise that there may be a need for support, and identify ways of obtaining it: in addition to assistance from your employer (where applicable), you may need to develop links with other local establishments and with agencies and professionals (e.g. the emergency services, the Local Authority, counsellors, social services, voluntary groups, your insurers, legal advice);
- It is highly likely that you will need alternative/additional telephone lines during an Emergency or Critical Incident – one or more spare mobile phones could be

kept for this purpose (kept charged and checked regularly to ensure that they are active and have sufficient credit).

Keep up-to-date lists of contact telephone numbers and addresses, including contact details of members of staff who have specific functions within the Emergency Plan:

- Contact lists should be readily accessible in more than one place (e.g. in the office, at home, on your smart phone): keep them in hard copy as well as electronically, unless electronic systems are robust enough to cope with loss of power and internet;
- Have a record of where lists are kept so that any changes are made to all copies;
- Have a robust system for keeping records of the names and other details of staff and participants and staff taking part in every visit, including medical information and emergency contact details of parents/next-of-kin (these should be available to the Visit Leadership Team, the Emergency Contacts and establishment managers) – see document [4.4j "Participant Information and Data Protection"](#);
- Ensure that all personal data, including names, telephone numbers and addresses, are held and processed securely – see document [4.4j "Participant Information and Data Protection"](#).

The Emergency Plan should include a checklist to prompt those managing the Emergency about practical actions they may need to take, and how to go about them, for example:

- Calling the emergency services;
- Informing parents;
- Informing the employer;
- Informing senior managers, governors/trustees, etc.;
- Sending staff to the scene of the incident to support the group;
- Arranging food/drink/shelter/accommodation/transport as necessary;
- Making emergency funds available;
- Addressing any safeguarding issues, and alerting social services if necessary;
- Arranging counselling;
- Informing insurers;
- Practical arrangements for the group travelling back to base and being reunited with parents etc.;
- Dealing with the media (see below).

Dealing with the Media

Experience suggests that there is likely to be intense pressure from the media. This may be directed at the establishment itself, the employer, and the group.

It is strongly recommended that there is control over indiscriminate and potentially damaging use of mobile phones by group members.

It is essential that press reports should contain accurate information under the control of the employer's or establishment's media/communications officer.

Establishment heads/managers should:

- Nominate a person (e.g. a governor or senior manager) who can be called upon to assist in responding to the media;
- Instruct all other staff not to give interviews or comment on any written or printed material, and make it clear no such material should be handed out to the media;
- Make sure that staff know where they should direct any media requests.

Activating the Emergency Plan

The Emergency Plan should include one or more Emergency Contact phone numbers to allow any leader (or participant) to alert the establishment to an Emergency. These must be available at any time that off-site visits could be in progress, including out of office hours, overnight and during weekends and holiday periods.

Any member of staff who might by chance receive a message in the event of an Emergency should know how to alert the Emergency Contact.

The Emergency Contact number(s) should always be answered by someone who knows how to respond. It should therefore not be a number that can be engaged for any length of time by other business, nor one that goes to an unmonitored answering service. If it is a mobile phone, the phone should be charged and never turned off (nor sound turned off) while an off-site visit is in progress.

There should be one or more Emergency Contacts nominated for the full duration of any visit, 24 hours a day. An Emergency Contact should be:

- Either a senior experienced member of staff who can immediately take charge of the incident;
- Or someone is trained in how to respond to a call, including alerting a senior experienced member of staff without delay, either directly or using an appropriate method such as a call-out list, group message or paging;
- Immediately available – i.e. their availability is not dependent upon arranging childcare or dealing with other commitments.

An Emergency Contact should have:

- A range of experience of practical visit leadership;
- Sufficient status within the organisation to guide the working practice of visit leaders in difficulty and to access support;
- Competence to make hard calls that will be backed by others in authority;
- Resilience – to be unflappable, organised and personally able to take control;
- The ability to reassure – to provide a calm, authoritative voice when others may be close to panic.

Guidance should be provided for anyone who may act as an Emergency Contact.

The Emergency Contact telephone number(s) should be available to all those who might be required to use them, including:

- All members of the visit leadership team;
- Participants in visits that involve remote supervision;
- Heads/managers and management teams;

- Education Visits Coordinators (EVCs).

For telephone communications to remain effective, it is strongly recommended that under no circumstances should anyone make these telephone numbers available to parents – who might otherwise over-burden and compromise the system.

Training, Testing and Practice

All relevant staff should be given a copy of the Emergency Plan, and be familiar with it. An effective way of preparing staff to deal with Emergencies, and of testing systems, is through scenario training.

Scenario Training - Visit Leaders and Assistant Leaders

Visit Leaders and Assistant Leaders should be competent to deal with minor incidents during visits. For more serious incidents, they should be familiar with the visit's Emergency Procedures, including how to trigger the establishment's Emergency Plan. They should also be able to manage an Emergency until help arrives.

Training for staff who act as Visit Leaders, or Assistant Leaders, should use scenarios which have a realistic likelihood of occurring during the type of visit they lead. For example:

- A coach breaking down on a motorway;
- A key member of staff taken sick;
- A participant suffering a close family bereavement;
- A participant going missing during a visit to a visitor attraction.

The training could be led by an experienced Visit Leader, EVC or head/manager who provides information about the scenario, observes the response and then facilitates a discussion.

Scenario Training – Establishment Response to an Emergency

This is an example of how scenario training could be used to test the Emergency Plan and to allow establishment staff to practice their roles.

1. Identify a suitable external person to act as scenario setter, observer, note taker and reviewer - for example an Outdoor Education Adviser, an appropriate Governor, or an experienced Educational Visits Coordinator (EVC), Head or manager from a neighbouring establishment.
2. The EVC selects a random and representative sample of visits each year and asks the scenario setter to create a relevant scenario prior to departure (i.e. the scenario involves that group on that trip on that day, all that is invented is the details of the incident).
3. The Visit Leader is given a sealed envelope and told when to open it during the visit. To make learning most effective only the external person, the EVC and the Visit Leader are aware of the test.
4. At the appropriate time the Visit Leader opens the envelope and alerts the establishment's Emergency Contact of the incident. ALL MESSAGES RELATING TO THIS SCENARIO SHOULD BEGIN BY CLEARLY INFORMING THE RECIPIENT THAT THIS IS A PRACTICE DRILL. This should be the case right through the

chain of escalation and continue until the incident is terminated. An unexpected drill is acceptable, but a fake emergency is not.

5. The Visit Leader can now put the message to one side and get on with the visit. At the first convenient opportunity (which may be in the evening of a residential or back at the establishment at the end of the trip) the whole Visit Leadership Team should sit down and decide what action they would have taken had the scenario been real – given that location, that weather, that group, those leaders etc., how would they have dealt with the situation? They should keep notes of their thinking and the EVC/external observer should debrief the group.
6. Once the establishment Emergency Contact receives the call, they should follow the procedure laid down in the Establishment’s Emergency Plan including contacting relevant senior managers etc.
7. The establishment management should use the scenario as a table-top exercise to work through the decisions they would make and the actions they would take. The external observer should record these and should review them with the group at the end of the exercise.
8. After the visit the EVC should review all the actions, collate the learning, feed back to both management and all staff, review the Emergency Plan and decide on any future training needs.

First Aid Training

Basic first aid is not at all complicated and many lives could be saved each year if more people knew how to open an airway, place a casualty into a safe airway position and deal with major bleeding/shock. Good practical first aid training is an excellent way to provide young people with a useful life skill while enhancing their self-esteem and self-confidence. It is also an excellent team building/group work activity.

It is, therefore, good practice for establishments to provide some form of first aid training to all students/young people and staff (whether certificated or not).

Counselling training

Consider the need for staff to be trained in bereavement counselling.

Media training

Heads/managers/governors and others who may be required to deal with the media, should seriously consider undertaking professional training for such circumstances.

Reviewing the Plan

Once the plan is operational, you should nominate a member of staff to regularly review and update its details. The plan should never be just a document on the shelf. Its purpose is to ensure that staff move automatically into emergency mode when an incident occurs.

To assist with keeping the plan, and all those it may affect, up to date it is good practice to:

- Ensure that emergency planning and response is discussed as part of the planning for all off-site visits;
- Obtain and act upon feedback from any real incidents, and from regular scenario training;
- Involve young people.

Further Information

Guidance from the Department for Education for schools on emergency planning and response is at: www.gov.uk/guidance/emergencies-and-severe-weather-schools-and-early-years-settings.

OEAP provides Management of Visit Emergencies (MOVE) training for establishment staff – see www.outdooreducationadvisers.co.uk/training.

