# Operational Policy: Traumatic Incidents (NAG 5)

## Blind & Low Vision Education Network NZ

## Statement of Intent:

The Blind & Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ) is responsible for providing a safe physical and emotional environment for ākonga and staff.

Research shows that traumatic incident management is enhanced when pre-planned and prepared for.

This policy is developed in accordance with advice to schools on youth suicide prevention from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Youth Affairs and the Ministry of Education.

BLENNZ is mindful of the additional risk factors associated with:

* A residential facility
* Providing residential provision for older adolescents going through major adjustments
* The management of unsupervised times as in the transition programme
* Ākonga travelling to and participating in Immersion Courses and Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) activities
* Diversity of ākonga needs.

BLENNZ is also conscious of its responsibility during traumatic incidents to recognise and provide appropriate:

* Interventions to help manage ākonga at risk
* Interventions with staff.

## Definition:

A traumatic incident or crisis is broadly defined as those events which:

* Cause sudden and/or significant disruption to the operation of a school
* Create significant dangers or risks to the wellbeing of ākonga, staff and others in the network or within the community.

Examples of traumatic incidents include (but are not limited to):

* The sudden death of ākonga or staff
* Witnessing serious injury or death of ākonga or staff
* The actual or threatened injury of ākonga or staff through sexual or physical violence
* Threats to safety including the presence at the educational setting of an individual behaving in a dangerous or threatening manner
* Ākonga or staff lost on an excursion
* Floods, fire, earthquakes, community crisis or disaster.

## Principles:

It is critical to the recovery of an educational setting or service that an incident is managed carefully to reduce the potential for further risk. The following principles guide the plan:

* Maintain normal structures: the resumption of familiar roles and routines as appropriate following a traumatic event helps to reduce the intensity and duration of difficulties that ākonga and staff can experience following a crisis event.
* Responses should be culturally and age appropriate: differing cultures can have different perceptions about a traumatic event. Provision of culturally appropriate responses provides supportive contexts for ākonga.
* Provide psychological first aid: those involved during, and immediately after, acute traumatic exposure can experience confusion, disorganisation and emotional numbness. Psychological first aid focuses on providing immediate support on the “here and now” and “what needs to happen next”.
* Communication should be clear and positive: this acts to reduce uncertainty and fear and prompts positive emotional and physical coping.

## Traumatic Incident Plan:

### Immediate First Actions:

* Ensure safety and account for all ngā ākonga and staff
* Provide immediate assistance as needed (e.g. CPR)
* Contact Emergency Services (phone 111)
* Activate the Traumatic Incident Management Plan (Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal, On Call Manager or as delegated)
* Document all incidents and actions.

### The First 24 Hours:

The Traumatic Incident Management Team meets as soon as possible. The Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal and/or On Call Manager assembles the Traumatic Incident Team which may include:

* Counsellor
* Relevant Deputy or Assistant Principals
* Relevant Practice Leads
* Board of Trustees representative
* Ministry of Education Traumatic Incident Team
* Site Manager
* Cultural liaison
* Community agency supports

Ensure that the team includes personnel not personally affected. If this is not possible contact the MOE Traumatic Incident Team.

### How to seek Ministry of Education assistance:

In the event of a traumatic incident, the senior staff member coordinating the Traumatic Incident Team will be responsible for contacting the MOE - call 0800 TI TEAM (0800 848 326). This number will put you in contact with your local MOE Traumatic Incident Coordinator or District Manager. If you are making a call from a mobile phone the number will put you in contact with a Traumatic Incident Coordinator or District Manager who will return your call and inform you of your nearest Traumatic Incident Coordinator. These calls will receive top priority. Previous experience shows that rapid responses from skilled teams create the best opportunities for supporting the recovery of those experiencing a traumatic incident. In addition:

* Ensure emergency services, Board of Trustees, MOE Special Education, Insurer, cultural liaison and community agencies are notified as needed
* Clarify sequence of events and facts
* 24 hour crisis management plan agreed on, including implementation strategy and ākonga and staff support strategy
* Regular traumatic incident management team meetings set (note: may need to meet 2-3 times in the first 24 hours)
* Continue to keep a written record of all events and interventions.

### Ongoing Support Plan:

The Principal will be the first point of media contact. Subsequent ongoing contact will be determined in consultation with the Board Chair. Considerations include:

* Ensuring all communications are accurate / consistent
* Avoiding distressing details
* Outlining the BLENNZ support strategy for ākonga and staff specific to the incident
* Cultural appropriateness
* Indicating one point of contact for enquiries
* Pre-planning of communication strategies with parents/agencies
* Ensuring front desk person is prepared
* Staff communication:
  + Contacting all staff personally ASAP (via phone tree)
  + Identifying staff that may be at risk – risk register
  + Preparing written statement to assist staff in communicating with ākonga (supported if necessary)
  + Arranging whole staff meetings ASAP
  + Ākonga communication
  + Ākonga informed in appropriate ways (e.g. individually or small groups)
* Family of victim:
  + Contacting and/or personal visit ASAP by Principal or representative
  + Family liaison strategy agreed and communicated with staff (include staff input)
* Parent community:
  + Newsletter
  + Front desk (prepared statement)
  + School meeting
* Briefing to staff about:
  + How to offer support
  + How to respond to distressed ākonga
  + How to facilitate discussion
  + Signs to watch out for
  + Support services available
* Ākonga/Families:
  + Identify ākonga most affected
  + At risk register – ākonga
  + Provide extra support staff and counsellors as needed
  + Put extra staff on duty as needed
  + Outside agency/referral support as needed
  + Staff de-briefing process as needed, with appropriate professional support (e.g. Employee Assistance Programme, Ministry of Education)

Restore BLENNZ to regular routine as soon as practicable while continuing to inform and support ngā ākonga, staff, parents and whānau.

Document all decisions, meetings and facts.

## Supporting Documents:

[Link to Ministry of Education Website: Traumatic Incident Support](http://education.govt.nz/school/student-support/emergencies/traumatic-incident-management-support/)

[Link to: Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)](https://www.eapservices.co.nz/)

Approved: 

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Next Review: 2026