

Incidents of a critical or distressing nature procedure

Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to outline Access4u's (we our, us) duty of care commitments when supporting our employees and customers through incidents of a critical and/or distressing nature, this includes notification, support and training requirements.

Scope

Compliance with this procedure is mandatory for all our staff, contractors, students, volunteers, visitors, board members, and any other person supporting our customers or that have a responsibility for the safe operation of our services, collectively referred to as 'employees' throughout this document.

For the purpose of this procedure, the term 'incident' generally refers to an undesirable event that has, or could have caused harm to our customers, community or employees, or any loss or damage to property. It includes all actual and alleged incident, near miss, accident, injury or hazard events.

Responsibilities and delegations

This policy applies to	Governing Body. Staff and Volunteers
Specific responsibilities	The Board – Responsible for ensuring effective governance mechanisms are in place. The CEO and Managers – Responsible for monitoring and ensuring adherence to Policy and related procedures. Ensure due diligence and take reasonable steps to ensure Access4u are meeting their obligations. Ensure objectives of the policy are achieved. Staff – Responsible for adherence to this and related policies, procedures and forms that support this policy.
Policy approval	CEO

Policy context – this policy relates to:

Standards	• Family and Community Services Act 1972 • National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguarding Framework • National Standards for Out-of-Home care (NOOHCS) • The Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People - Charter of Rights
Legislation	• Children and Young People (Safety) (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2017 • Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 • Children's Protection Law Reform (Transitional Arrangements and Related Amendments) Act 2017 • Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992

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	• National Disability Insurance Scheme (Incident Management and Reportable Incidents) Rules 2018 • National Disability Insurance Scheme (Provider Registration and Practice Standards) Rules 2018 • National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 • The Disability Act 2006 • The Disability Services Act SA 1993 • Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA) • Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012 (SA)
Contractual obligations	• Government of SA, DCP Contract Management Framework • NDIS Code of Conduct
Organisation policies and procedures	• Work health and safety • Incident management • Positive behaviour support • Customer safeguarding • Child Abuse Report Line (CARL) • Employee assistance • Domestic and family violence support policy • Staff Development and Training policy
Forms, record keeping, other documents	

Definitions for the purpose of this policy the following definitions apply:

Word	Definition
<i>Critical incident</i>	is an event occurring at, or in conjunction with, work which requires immediate action or consideration. Critical incidents include: • sudden death of a customer or colleague • witnessing a traumatic injury or death of another person • an accident or situation of acute danger with the potential for or actual occurrence of serious harm • any other event resulting in significant harm. Critical incidents are sudden, unexpected, and traumatic and have the potential for severe and protracted adverse effects, both physiological and psychological.
<i>Distressing incidents</i>	are situations resulting in gradual or expected stress or emotional discomfort, such as interpersonal conflict with a colleague, disciplinary action or exposure to significant or concerning customer behaviours.

Procedure Statement

We are committed to ensuring our employees and customers who are involved in or witness incidents of a critical and/or distressing nature have access to timely and appropriate support.

We have a duty of care for our employees and customers and are responsible for ensuring risks to psychological and physical health and wellbeing are minimised. This includes the provision of counselling and other supports to deal with incidents of a critical and/or distressing nature.

Our employees may experience incidents involving death (both expected and unexpected) and other traumatic or distressing events. These incidents may have adverse effects on customers as well as employees.

Any incident of a critical and/or distressing nature must be reported immediately, or as soon as practicable, by telephone to the employee's Executive Manager and CEO. Refer to our Incident management policy for more information.

Critical and/or distressing incidents

Death

Executive managers and line managers will provide support for employees and customers affected by the event of expected or anticipated death of a customer or colleague. This may include:

- the opportunity to discuss the event
- bereavement counselling
- spiritual support (through local churches, hospital chaplains)
- the opportunity to attend the person's funeral
- post-funeral follow up and monitoring
- referral to the Employee Assistance Program (refer Employee assistance procedure).

Physical aggression by customer

Incidents of physical aggression or significant behaviour of concern can be distressing for witnesses, regardless of if the aggression is directed at them or others.

Refer to our Positive behaviour support policy for more information on management of behaviours of concern.

Physical aggression by another person

For incidents of physical aggression towards an employee by another person who is not our customer, such as another employee, family member, member of the community:

- move other people to a safe place if required, such as if there is extensive property damage
- apply first aid and/or call 000 (Ambulance) if medical assistance is required
- support all persons to access a recovery period. This may involve time away from the aggressor, a rest break and other support
- once the physical and psychological needs of those involved have been met, provide a debrief session
- analyse the incident
- the incident should be reviewed with the employee(s) involved, their line manager and other relevant

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employees where relevant, such as Human Resources, Quality Risk and Compliance, or Work Health and Safety Coordinator

- identify possible causes
- assess the effectiveness
- recommend any changes required

Refer to our Domestic and family violence policy and Incident management policy for more information.

Major trauma

For incidents involving major trauma, we will (where relevant)

- provide employees with alternative duties
- provide customers with alternative locations or other services within our existing resources
- provide practical assistance and support where this is reasonable and helpful

Managers must be sensitive in their supervision and support of affected employees and customers.

All employees should ensure the work environment is supportive and sympathetic to the needs of all employees involved in the traumatic event.

Implementation

Reporting incidents of a critical and/or distressing nature

All incidents must be reported in our Incident Management System (IMS) within 24 hours, or as soon as practicable after the incident.

Depending on the nature of the incident, we may be required to make a report to an external agency. This may include (but is not limited to) reporting to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, Department for Child Protection, and/or SafeWork SA

Refer to our Incident management policy and Incident management flowchart for more information on reporting incidents.

Precautions and responses

Emergency procedures are displayed in a prominent location across all our work locations.

Our employees receive training in emergency response and how to manage significant incidents.

All incidents, including incidents of a critical and/or distressing nature, are reviewed and managed through relevant organisational committees. These include

- Incident Review Group
- Quality Risk and Compliance Committee
- Work Health and Safety (embedded in all operational and strategic meetings)
- Restrictive Practices Committee

Where appropriate, changes to the workplace environment, policies and procedures and recommendations will be made through the relevant committee.

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Training

All employees will be made aware of the requirements of this procedure and all new employees will be instructed in the contents and requirements of the procedure during their induction.

Managers will be provided with appropriate training that gives the skills and knowledge to be able to respond appropriately to critical incidents. This training will ensure that the immediate and ongoing impact of such events is appropriately managed, reducing the likelihood and effects of conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Refer to our Staff Development and Training policy for more information.

Support

In recognition of the potential impact on employee's health and wellbeing involved in incidents of a critical and/or distressing nature, we provide a 24 hour, free, professional and confidential service to employees and volunteers through the Employee Assistance Program. Refer to our Employee assistance procedure for more information.

It is recognised that professional support can

- have a positive impact on an individual
- reduce the ongoing effect of a traumatic event
- assist an individual's psychological well-being.

Managers will recommend the employees access the Employee Assistance Program to individuals immediately following and in the post-event follow up after any distressing or critical incidents.

Managing personal responses

Normal responses to threatening or difficult situations include fear and anger. The purpose of this is for self-protection. It is important employees are aware of how they respond in threatening situations so they can control their response and build skills to manage difficult situations.

Reactions are an important risk indicator that should not be ignored.

Physical responses may include

- rapid shallow breathing
- rapid pounding heartbeat
- feeling of tension in stomach, chest, head or entire body
- sweating
- clenching of jaw, teeth or fists
- pacing
- wanting to cry
- trembling
- flushed face

Personal triggers

Most people have previous experiences of difficult situations. These experiences can act as triggers in certain circumstances. Awareness of personal triggers will help employees deal with future situations.

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To gain a deeper understanding of their triggers employees can consider the following questions, or discuss with other employees:

- what do you perceive as a situation that might put you 'at risk'?
- what types of situations affect you most?
- how do you currently deal with different types of situations that arise?
- what gives you the most concern and why?
- which situations do you find most difficult and why?
- what might prevent you from asking for support and protection?

Common personal reactions

There are a range of common personal reactions resulting from exposure to a confronting situation at work. Employees can be affected because of a single incident or as a cumulative response to the impact of their work. Reactions may occur immediately or may be experienced some time later.

Some common reactions include

- fear of the customer
- not wanting to come to work
- fear of reporting the incident
- crying
- inability to sleep
- feelings of powerlessness
- self-blame and guilt
- anger at work and in personal relationships
- damages to your profession or self-image
- headaches
- anxiety or depression