

Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

Core components of responding to and recovering from critical incidents in secondary schools

Presented by **Joanne Homs** (headspace) and **Nicole Flatley** (headspace)

Joanne Homs

Thank you for joining today's breakout session. Together we'll explore the core components of recovering and responding from critical incidences in secondary schools. My name is Jo Homs, and I'm a 'Be You' senior clinical consultant within the New South Wales Headspace, schools 'Be You' team. I'm delighted to be joined by the Nicole Flatley. Thanks, Nicole. And I also want to acknowledge our wonderful moderators who are supporting the session via our chat box. Who'll be engaging with you and Nicole, and our moderators will be feeding in your contributions and your insights, so we're really glad to be able to connect with you on this type of platform.

Today, we'll draw from our own experiences in working with schools, as well as highlighting an evidence informed practice that is available to secondary schools and highlight how schools are able to foster a protective environment, even when managing complex and uncertain times, particularly when responding and recovering from critical incidences. It is a privilege for both Nicole and I to be connecting with you today. And we really look forward to hearing from you and learning about the actions you're already undertaking. And if there are further actions you may like to engage in, we hope that the session may prompt ideas and actions to take back into your school community. Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the land on where I'm sitting on today. The Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, I acknowledge and I pay my respects to Elders past present and emerging, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living and working on the land throughout Australia.

I invite you to also acknowledge the land on from where you're joining us from today. The chat box is available and I'd love to hear from you, if you wanted to pop in what, land or country you're living and working on, that would be great. While people are adding their comments into the chat box, I'd like to mention the Always Be You resources and direct your attention to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies website. If you follow this link, you can locate the name and learn more about the history of your local country. We're really committed to enriching our learning practice at Be You, and the Always Be You resources are also popped in the chat box for your convenience. If you'd like to save them for a later time and connect with them, they'll be available for you as well as some other links and resources we'll share without the course of today's breakout session.

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For those of you who don't know About Be You, or haven't been to one of our virtual conferences, Be You is a national mental health initiative for educators, and they are the organiser of this conference. It is led by Beyond Blue, and we work in partnership with Early Childhood Australia, and headspace.

Be You is completely free, available to every educator, early learning service, and school in Australia. Be You aims to empower and support children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing, as well as looking after your own mental health as an educator. We offer educators online, professional learning, fact sheets, other events, and other professional learning resources. There are tools and processes that live within the Be You initiative, that can help foster and implement a whole learning community approach to mental health wellbeing. For discussions throughout the conference, we'll highlight some of these resources, tools, and professional learning to show you how Be You can support a whole school and a whole-service approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Recent events have reinforced the need for mental health and wellbeing strategies. Over the course of the conference, there's been 10 key elements that were really designed to highlight some of the strategies and resources and material that can support early learning services, primary schools, and secondary schools. The session that I'll be taking you through with Nicole by my side, is really focused at the secondary school session, and how we can learn to manage and respond to critical incidences in the secondary school setting. The evidence and material I'll be covering is really focused at that stage of secondary schools.

During the course of the conference and particularly for this session, I'd invite you all to practice self-care. Perhaps you could take a moment now to think about a protective strategy, or a protective way you could look after yourself. We'd like this online space to be one that's really safe and engaging and supportive for all our participants, considering the nature of the content, and in light of recent and global considerations, some of the material you may find that it impacts you in certain ways. So if that arises for you, please take a break, hopefully you can engage with something or someone that's uplifting and nurturing. Take care of yourself and set boundaries around self-disclosure. If you wish to discuss incidents that you've had experienced at your school, please do so, but, please do not identify any child you may be considering. We certainly have a lot to learn from you, and we'd love for you to share your voice, but please do so only if you're comfortable. We value our educators' wellbeing all across Australia. So we've popped in some wellbeing tools and strategies in the chat box for you. And you can look at them at another time or have them saved on your desktop. These links are really focused at looking after yourself as an educator, while caring for young people and children.

I'd also like to acknowledge that emerging minds who are a Be You delivery partner for the Bushfire Response Program. Today, I'm going to also be showcasing some of the material from the educators' trauma toolkit. The Emerging Minds Community Trauma Toolkit contains resources to help children and young people and adults before, during and after a disaster or traumatic event. Again, if you'd like to access this toolkit, we've placed it in your chat box for your convenience. We'll be looking at trauma. And then throughout the second half of the presentation, I'm going to highlight the 10 core components of effective suicide postvention practice, and how they are similar intersections of managing critical incidences in a whole-school community. Alright, so we're going to wrap up the session with some actions you may like to consider that are really preventative and informed by best practice... Practice, for managing critical incidences.

So let's have a look at defining what a critical incidence is, and what trauma reactions or responses we may see in our young people in our school community. The World Health Organisation shares the definition of a critical incident, and that they may occur within the school or outside the school. These challenging events include a death in the community, accidents or a serious injury, natural disasters, just to name a few. Children and young people, school and staff, family members can all be impacted by a critical incident, and their experiences can be naturally really different to each other, depending on the incident and an a range of related personal environmental factors. In addition, not everyone will respond to a critical incident in the

same way. Critical incidences may be overwhelming, or they may threaten the ability for someone to, or they may threaten the ability of a coping strategy, which may feel overwhelming. This then has impact on an individual's coping capacity and also the coping capacity of a whole learning school community. When someone has an experience like this, this overwhelms their ability to cope, and we call this trauma.

Again, Emerging Minds have a great video and a resource that really unpacks the definition of trauma. A link has been shared, and you may like to watch this at another time. Following on from our keynote speaker from yesterday, the critical incidences that can affect and impact your school community really vary. And the reaction and responses really vary in the adolescent phase. And this is because of the developmental stages of adolescence, the exposure of an incident also may vary due to it being in a secondary school. We know our young people have access to different means that, younger children may not have access to. So they use social media, their interpersonal relationships are quite different at the secondary phase. And this is how we start to measure and map out the exposure and impact of an incident. What we may start to notice is the grief and bereavement of adolescents could be based on their life experiences. They are, these are, these include things like family history, connection to the incident past or previous traumas, and the perceived or direct impact of the incident.

Our evidence and the work we've done with schools indicates that some incidences like a suicide death, can have a ripple effect on the entire school community. This is why we measure the impact and we respond accordingly. The devastation that can occur when such an event has happened can be really challenging for schools, students, and families. We'll arrive on some content a little bit later on, that showcases the evidence and the tools on how schools can exactly manage and respond to those considerations, when responding to such an event. I'm reminded that the significance of a critical incident should not be measured by the impact it has on the community. Sorry, I'm a little tongue tied. The significance of a critical incident should be measured by the impact on the community, not at size itself. So we know these type of incidences can have impacts on three different elements.

So focusing on three elements and starting with children and young people, what we might start to notice is how the incident is impacting them based on their developmental stages. So children and young people might react in different ways. The impact may not always be obvious, nor will it be immediate. It can be delayed, it can be deferred, or initially very traumatising for adolescents. I'd like to also point out for our young people, this might be their first experience in managing a grief or loss. It might be their first bereavement. So keeping that in mind when we're supporting adolescents, and mapping that to their reaction is really important. This could be their first emotional injury that they have ever experienced. So it could be very, very devastating. And we might start to notice this in their reactions and responses. The impact on educators is the second element I'd like to highlight. So the impact on our educators will also vary, and this can depend on a number of factors, similar to young people, the relationship, their own personal and protective factors, the identification with the incident, the personal history, and the support available to staff at the time of the incident and moving into the recovery phase. So really the impact it has in, on educators, can be drawn to the way the school manages the incident.

The third point I wanted to point out is an aftermath feeling of an impact of uncertainty on our wellbeing. This can be for the whole school, families, young people, and educators. So sometimes after a critical incident, the community may feel a sense of helplessness, or hopelessness, or lack of control. This is because they might be experiencing this uncertain feeling that the incident may reoccur, they might be worried about that it might happen again, or that their safety is in some way jeopardised due to the impact that the event has had on their school. So at that point, we really look at mapping the safety of the event, making sure all the risks are mitigated and looking at recovery for those people, struggling with the uncertainty of their own wellbeing.

Let's have a look at the students' responses and reactions. So we know with those elements, and we know that what we have seen during COVID-19 is that our responses and our reactions to critical incidences can be quite varied in our students, our staff, and our family community. I'd like to invite you to reflect on some

of the student responses and reactions that you've noticed in the past. So following or managing a critical incident, if you can use the chat box, it would be great to hear some of your observations in what you've seen in students. So when we look for responses and reactions, what we start to map out and what we would invite you to observe, is the behavioural signs that you might have noticed. Physical, emotional, or cognitive. So I'll let you sit there for a minute and perhaps pop in the chat box, some of the first things you might be seeing or hearing.

So Nikki, while we wait for some reactions, in the work that you've done supporting schools through critical incidences and your work as a secondary school teacher, what were some of the first things that you've been able to notice after or during a critical incident?

Nicole Flatley

Yeah, I guess the main thing that I've noticed is, all students really react differently and there's quite a diversity of responses. So what I've noticed is that sometimes you might see some kids become really hyper aroused and hyper vigilant, with others, you might find that they withdraw, and they're just really, really quiet. It really varies, I guess, in terms of the trauma they've experienced before and how that might impact them in this situation. I think as well, there's also often a, I think you mentioned this before preoccupation with the incident, that's really common. And, but then again, for other kids, they might be actually thinking, not being able to recall things, or their memory might not be so good. So it's really diverse. And I guess, what I've noticed is just knowing, by me knowing the young people that I've worked with, knowing the different reactions has been something that I've helped to identify if they might need additional support. But yeah, really diverse reactions I've noticed in the school system.

Joanne Homs

That's great.

Nicole Flatley

Yeah, so we're just waiting for a few to come through. So while we wait for that, do you want me to let you know when they come back?

Joanne Homs

Yeah that would be great. You've covered such a varied, response. So thank you for that. So I'll move us along and we'll come back to student responses and reactions. Let's have a look at trauma explained. And this might help us understand some of those are reactions that we might see initially, or what we might see up over a prolonged time. A traumatic event is a powerful and distressing experience, that can be life threatening, or is life threatening, and poses significant threat to a person's physical or psychological wellbeing. Trauma results from an event or a series of events that subjectively cause a person to feel helpless and pushed beyond their ability to cope. Not all students are affected in the same way by each traumatic event or experience.

Trauma can cause a hypersensitivity in the body's survival mechanism. This is what we call the 'fight, flight or freeze' response. Trauma can disrupt the relationship a young person has with their family, with their educators, as well as interrupt the developmental stages that they are at in school, and in their social and emotional learning, and their interrelationships and their behaviours. And we might see this come out in their emotional reactions, and those relationships with the ones that they care about the most. You got some things that have come through.

Nicole Flatley

Sorry I just thought it might because it ties in with what you were talking about. So someone has said, some of our students who are already seeing the counsellor for other reasons, I've noticed, have coped better than students who would usually cope well. And there's a real, a highlight of anxiety and withdrawal, and lots of worry. And then someone else highlighted, the fear of participating in getting sick or germs has been something that, has been highlighted as well.

Joanne Homsj

Great and I think there's some great examples of perhaps for some young people who've had anxiety pre-COVID, they're kind of those examples that we talk about, about young people being vulnerable already, before the event has even happened. So we can see some pre-existing conditions have now been somewhat brought to light or even kind of exacerbated. So they're the kind of things that we consider when mapping the trauma reaction and who might be really vulnerable to this incident. So that's great, thanks for sharing that. Let's have a quick look at types of trauma. They can be individual traumas. So an accident or an assault, ongoing traumas, things like abuse and neglect and bullying. So ongoing is suggesting that it's happening more than once. And it's, you know, creating a collective traumatic experience for our young people. We've got mass traumas. So things like natural disasters, bush fires, storms, and acts of terror, witnessing or hearing about a traumatic event can be a trauma in itself, and memories of past traumas. Up to about one in four children will experience a traumatic event during childhood. Unfortunately, some children experience a number of traumas, and the effect may be, may accumulate, which can make those children more vulnerable to the stress reaction that we might see during a critical incident.

On this slide you'll see some of those reactions and responses explained in those four categories. Now we've already covered a few. What came through the chat box seems to have, kind of fit all four categories. Someone explained, the behaviouralist come forward with the way that a young person might be wanting to keep themselves safe during this uncertain time, things like worrying about their safety and the cleanliness of the school, and so on. That might come through their behaviour. When we're looking at other critical incidences, for example, we might see irritability, aggression, regression, difficulty enjoying activities. Teens also may start to engage in risk-taking behaviours. These can be things like smoking, drug and alcohol use, or even school truancy. We've got the physical and the emotional. So if we look at physical responses, these are the body, these are body reactions, and young people and adults can actually start to feel the effects of managing the stress in the body. And these might present itself in our appetite. So changes in our appetites, a sleep difficulties, headaches, stomach-aches, and restlessness.

When we look at young people, the emotional response can be one that is quite indicative that a young person isn't coping. They may not have all the words to share how they're feeling, but their emotional responses can tell quite a story. We might see an outburst of anger. There might be frustration or distress, anxiety, sadness, or helplessness. The cognitive part of this graph on the screen really explains the changes in the thinking. And I think Nikki explained that really well. So during an event or after an event, they might be cognitive difficulties. So a young person may have challenges remembering the incident, or to the opposite side of the continuum. There might be a preoccupation with the incident, from a learning perspective we may also see a decline in their functioning at school, due to the response that they're managing. So, what we try and do at this stage is we identify those responses. We monitor those young people and I can see from the chat box, there are schools who know who are struggling.

So what are the support considerations for students? Some students might also experience grief after a critical incident, due to the loss that they would be experiencing. This could be categorised in bereavement. The loss might not be of a loved one. It could be a loss of a home, their belongings, their pets, amongst many others. These are just a few things, but it can really vary depending on the incident that we're managing. The similar intersections between the grief and trauma response really varies. However, our interventions can be quite different. So what can we do to support students following an incident? Noticing how our students is coping, is one of the first steps that we can take. If we notice the young person is struggling and they've got some of those signals and signs on the previous slide, we can take that action and collect some information to support that young person. Our chat box moderators have popped in a useful tool called the Battle's Tool. The Be You framework really supports this tool, and the tool itself is an observation tool. It helps educators map out signs and things to look out for in the classroom that are connected to a young person's behaviour, their emotions, their thoughts, the impact that the thing that you're observing has on their learning. And finally a stance for their social relationships.

When mapping out the impact and what we're noticing in a young person and it's becoming quite clear that

support needs to be offered. What we can do is work with the family and parent community body, and make a, a supportive plan for the young person. And we can connect with the appropriate service that supports those young peoples in that consideration. We do this both internally and externally. When does a student need extra support? And I think, kind of covered this in the previous slide, but what I'd like to do is really normalise the traumatic response we might have after an incident. It's not our job to diagnose trauma, but what it is our job is to notice when a young person may need extra support. We do this by monitoring, and eventually we'll be able to provide that additional support when we work together as a community. So what might you look out for if you're an educator and you're supporting students? Symptoms that persist for longer than one month. We look for show, we look for signs that there's a significant decline in their performance. We might start to observe things that the young person is doing that is that are quite different, and the young person that the stress itself, the distress is starting to interfere with their daily functioning. We would look at a young person's behaviour. Is it being disruptive? Are they withdrawing? Are they engaging in risk taking behaviour? So really looking for a difference in behaviour as well. We'd also look at ongoing stresses outside of the school and mapping out if there's other areas of concern that the young person's ability to cope is starting to become overwhelming.

Routine stability is one of the most important steps to building a really safe and protective environment for students. We also know it can build resilience in our student body. Providing safe and secure learning opportunities can be really impactful for students. Alongside appropriate and evidence-based interventions, a school's recovery plan can be a really protective strategy for all students who were struggling directly from the incident, and for those who are managing quite well. So having a whole school approach to recovery can be positive for each child and each family member, no matter where you're sitting on that continuum of mental health and wellbeing. So I'd really like to ask another reflective question. And I'm curious that, to hear from you, following a critical incident, what is a strategy or an activity you've introduced in the classroom that has had a positive impact on your young people? We'll give you a couple of minutes to have a think about that. It doesn't have to be a grand strategy. It could've been something that you adopted during the COVID response, or it could be an another time where you've been able to foster a really great classroom environment during or after a critical incident. I'm gonna hand over to Nikki to, do you have any experiences that you can share or that you've heard that schools have implemented or anything you've seen first-hand?

Nicole Flatley

Yeah, like, I really like this idea of a recovery-focused classroom because I think, it really sharpens our focus. And in the recovery-focused classrooms, I've been involved in and also observed I think it's keeping it really simple. So keeping those boundaries firm but also flexible and I often think of it like a bouncing castle. You know, where kids can jump inside there, they're safe, because there's the boundaries that are there, but the they're flexible. So I think our boundaries still need to be there, and be predictable, but having that flexibility really allows for that movement, depending on where that young person might be at. I think, as well, it's important as teachers that, we're always doing this, I know, but remembering our voice, being calm and responsive, even if you may not feel that. And just being really monitoring those things, because they will really set the scene for the children and the young people in your classes. And they will really feed of that. So if someone's anxious, I know when I used to be in an anxious state, that would really flow on to the young people. So I really had to keep my own emotions in check and get support elsewhere.

I guess as well, it's also the other thing that I noticed was going at their own pace. So allowing young people to really track at their own pace, cause you don't know, like you said before, you don't know what sort of trauma they've experienced in the past. You don't know what the layers are. So allowing them to go at their own place, but also making sure that they have the boundaries and the expectations. But, sometimes, those expectations may need to be adjusted because there is impact there, often. I guess, what else have we got here in the chat box. Oh yeah, a few people have spoken, which is great. So pair and share discussions with the students and counsellors. Meeting with small groups of students and walk and talk with class. Oh I love that idea so the movement and sharing what's going on while people are...while the young people are walking together. Circle time discussion about incidents, if appropriate. Zones of

regulation, social stories and... Oh! This is a great one. So checking in for the readiness to learn, using a variety of tools. So this is great because using creative writing and art. So we know that some students are really comfortable with art, while others might be more comfortable with writing. Having those multiple entry points for young people to be able to express what's going on without having to do it verbally, is often a great way. So having those, yeah, different entry points for young people is excellent. It's great! Thank you.

Joanne Homs

That's fantastic! I can't even add anything further. Though what I love about the chat box contributions, is you can land off one another, and it's just great to hear those suggestions.

Nicole Flatley

Yep.

Joanne Homs

What I can also hear is that the outcomes have been reduced, and process on recovery is the biggest, key factor here. So that's really wonderful to hear. So thinking about recovery as a whole, in our recovery-focused classrooms, we also know that recovery after a... recovery at a whole school approach is really important. And now I'm going to draw your attention and cover a few slides that have really focused on the work that we do within the Be You framework, and with the Headspace team that is focused on suicide postvention practice for Australian schools. Headspace National launched the delivery report that is called the Effective Suicide Postvention in Australia Communities Report, last year. This report is one of the... this report is a culmination of the work that we've done in suicide postvention in school communities all across Australia.

The Australian Federal Government funded Headspace School Support Programme, between 2011 and 2017, and this report shares our key learnings and recommendations from this time. We are really pleased that this important work still exists and continues within the Be You framework. The Be You service and the Be You consultants, the service, the tools within the framework really supports Australian schools to be prepared to respond and to recover from the suicide of a student or a school community member. Be You consultants are based at Headspace and can provide secondary support to schools who have experienced a death by suicide. During former experiences in responding to the nature of these types of devastating incidences, there are interceptions and similarities that are relevant to other critical incidences. Particularly for focusing on the recovery and management cycle.

So on this slide here, you'll see a list of effective suicide postvention practices. So when we do provide our support to schools, what we do is we map out a range of steps and actions that can assist the school to respond and manage and recover from such an incident. What we do has a lot of rationale, and a lot of process behind what we do. And to name a few, I'm gonna go through and explain, why we do them, and the process behind them. So the first few go hand-in-hand together.

So cross-sector partnerships between education and health services, as well as strong working partnerships between schools and community and local service providers. The teams here in...that work with schools who are in this predicament, can really help a school foster those partnerships with local services. The reason we encourage schools to connect with a local service during this time, is because they're a service that's really well placed that support a bereaved community following a death by suicide. When our schools work together, we can invite Headspace centres there are local community and mental health teams to support those students who may need referrals at this point. We also lend on national services who have focused material and support that are focused on dealing and managing with a death by suicide. We encourage and foster a whole school, community and sector approach, to mental health and well-being. We do this by encouraging support-seeking messages for the whole school community, in or within or outside supporting to an incident. This is...these are messages that encourage staff to access support, students and family members. Number four is ongoing postvention planning. How we achieve this, is we offer Australian schools the opportunity to create and develop a plan that is evidence-based and

create it in consultation with your school and our teams here. What we'd encourage you to do when developing a plan is develop a, is to introduce an emergency response team. And that plan is one that's, encompasses all the aspects that you might need when responding to such an incident.

So they're things, they're practical things like numbers and services and actions and processes. The reason we encourage schools to have a plan is because when we are managing our own response and our own reaction to sad news, we might not be able to think of everything at that time. So having a plan can be really protective, really protective for all community members, particularly those leading the strategy that encompasses so much level of detail and consideration. We also have timely and tailored clinical support available to your school. So our teams can support your school with the initial 24-hour to 48-hour time period, cause we know that's a really critical time for intervention. At that time, we really look at informing the community and managing. Number six really showcases the early identification and management of vulnerable students. So at this stage, the rationale behind this is before an incident takes place we know that there are vulnerable students already. These vulnerable students could be those that are over-represented in the suicide and self-harm statistics. They could be young people who are, you know, were really susceptible to feeling the strong impact from the incident that's occurred. We also really covered today with your contributions that young people come with a range of personal experiences and some may have pre-existing concerns as well.

The last three points are really focused on some of the things that we can support the school with, and that is promoting a well-being, a well-being approach to your staff community. So making sure that your staff are really, staff are being focused at staying in our role, cause we know during such a devastating time that the staff are going to be managing and supporting our young people in and outside of our classrooms. So with this point, the process would be letting staff know to take a break when they need to, to step aside from tasks if they need to delegate, and also to access their own supports the same way we would do for a young person. Finally, the last two points. I'll just quickly highlight the long-term recovery support. What we do at this point is we connect with the school after we've managed the critical first couple of days, we look at a long-term recovery support plan. The reason we do this is we know within the 12-month marker period, there could be key dates and milestones that the school might find that the grief is starting to revisit itself in the community. And you might need extra support, and the Be You consultancy here to support you through those milestones. Our team have, you know, effectively collect data on suicide statistics, vulnerable groups, minority groups. And they do that to be able to enhance the experience available to schools. We know that vulnerable people are really, really an important statistic to look at. And we can look at those considerations by collecting appropriate research and data in the suicide postvention realm.

A key action to all the work that we do, is preparedness. We know that it's very vital, we know that understanding these practices before we have to engage them can be incredibly helpful for our educators, and our school leaders as well. Particularly if we're making fast decisions and we know that learning these principles can help build a protective strategy for the whole school, as well as building a crisis management and recovery response for your school community. I'd like to highlight the Be You resources, the Suicide Postvention Toolkit. The toolkit provides some practical evidence and informed support advice when managing such an incident. This, the, toolkit itself is broken up into Section A, B and C. It's really helpful to understand what considerations and strategies need to be implemented at different time frames, when managing such an incident. And at those particular timeframes, what might be needed.

So we've got Section A, which is our immediate response. That really helps the school understand what needs to happen before enabling a postvention plan response. Section B are short term things like monitoring young people, identifying vulnerable community members and who may be at risk due to the considerations that are interrelated with the community. Section C is things like anniversary planning, really long-term recovery focus considerations. We also might look at the grief reactions for recovery of 12 months and beyond, and the considerations the school can implement for recovery. I'm gonna ask Nikki a quick question... cause I know that you've used this toolkit with schools, and you've had access to it. In your experience, can you highlight anything in the toolkit that schools find particularly useful or helpful?

Nicole Flatley

Yeah, I think the feedback that I've had with working with schools, is particularly in that 24-hour phase, where it's, where you know, the critical incident's happened, and people are trying to manage that. And everyone's anxiety obviously goes up, which is a natural response. And I think the scripts and templates within the toolkit are crucial in this stage, because we can't really process and think what's going on and how best to deliver that information. What's great is the scripts are there, they're laid out, it gives you an idea about how to do to deliver difficulty information to students, to staff, to families, and you don't have to do all that brainstorming when you're in the height of that critical incident. So that's probably the best, the most useful tool, and lots of other schools have also said that they're really grateful when they receive those scripts. And I guess I'd also mention the fact sheets as well, which I think, yeah, that you might mention as well.

Joanne Homsy

That's a great point. And some of the supporting documents that go hand-in-hand with the toolkit are our related fact sheets. I think what's useful about the fact sheets, is that they can really unpack what we might start to notice in our grief response, when we are responding to a death by suicide. We know it's a different reaction that we might start to notice. And the fact sheets can go hand-in-hand when communicating with our school members, whether that be young people, or family communities, or staff. So they can really explain things that various groups may feel or affect at that certain time. So those considerations could be cultural. They could be understanding grief for adults and staff self-care, and there's considerations that need to be in place in our self-care when following a death by suicide.

So again, the fact sheets are a great resource that can go hand-in-hand. And we can also use our fact sheets, not just when responding to an incident. This is our critical incident manage wheel. And you can see that we've already highlighted that the most effective way to respond, and to recover from a critical incident, is really a planned and structured approach. This allows us to provide a supportive and caring response that considers the mental health and wellbeing of the whole school community. It offers a degree of safety and security, and it's supportive of decision-making with thoughtful plans in place. A quality critical incident response can contribute to reducing further risks, and it can promote connectedness within the whole school community. It gives us a chance to promote help-seeking, and it supports the three main areas of recovery.

I'm gonna take us through these four actions that really are intersected into the wheel. I'm gonna start with the preparedness. I might be a little bit repetitive, but if you don't, if you haven't done so already, you might like to write or update your critical incident management plan. This could be for any incident, you might like to, at when it's an appropriate point, look at some of the great learnings that have come through from our response to COVID-19. I know speaking to our schools across the country, there has been some, an amazing area of growth and opportunity. There's been fast learning, there's also been things that... we could do differently next time, as well. And that's totally acceptable and quite normal. The regular review of your emergency and critical incident plan is important, and it enhances the effectiveness of your whole learning community. We encourage you to adopt a learning culture. This is one that supports, the education and training of our educators and our young people.

We've already talked about the effectiveness of a safe classroom, one that focuses on wellbeing, as well as getting through our academic obligations as well. When we adopt a learning culture, we understand that each critical incident may require a different response plan. We can't lend the plan to each incident because we know the impact could be quite different. Drawing on a trauma-informed approach, there are pillars that really explain the emotional and behavioural regulation that is needed for young people to restore back to a safe learning community. So adopting a learning culture, as educators and as leaders, can be really protective to learn how we might change our response, depending on the incident that we're managing. Recovery is a really great word. I think I'm, you know, and it just, it's sometimes it's after following a really devastating incident. And we might hear things like post-traumatic stress could occur, and... the trauma and the stress and the reactions that might occur. But we also have post-traumatic

growth. And that really is the recovery after an incident.

What I've witnessed across the country is an incredible... compassionate resilience that has been supported by our educators, to our young people. This really starts to build the recovery of a whole-school approach, no matter what the incident might be. We know that we can do things like supporting structures and processes. Yesterday, we connected with some members in the conference and they were explaining about some processes that have been introduced that might stay post-COVID. So we know that wellbeing protocols and dialogue has been introduced about mental health and wellbeing, and it's a really exciting time to have them, you know, continuing on the agenda, keeping them part of the recovery plan, so making help-seeking really visible, really accessible to everyone, and keeping a part of the recovery focus lens. Collaboration and community. These are really, these are key factors into those four actions. So think about, you might like to think about, is there a service that you'd like to connect with that is relevant to what your school is managing. And if it is a service, write it down and put an action for yourself to learn more about that service, and to further build connection.

So when you are in a heightened time, you can draw off that strong partnership. We might also look at the collaboration between our family and parent community. Is that an area that we could preventively and actively involved in now, while we're in a safe place, so we can again lend off those pathways and those are protocols. Recovering after an incident is really important. And I've really covered this, but it actually came through the chat box quite beautifully, that staff and students do recover quite differently. But one way that students may like to recover is talking about the incident, and in safe ways that might be really appropriate. So that was great that Nikki was able to share that over. Recovery is different for everyone. We wanna create a feeling of safety.

We also want schools to let children express their fears and their reactions in a really safe and protective way. Staying connected with children and families is a real priority. And we want to use a range of processes, tools and resources, as well as communication strategies that are protective and supportive for children to do so. We wanna build trust, we wanna build recovery. We wanna build resilience, hope, and by doing that we can build our recovery for our schools.

When we are in recovery, I also wanted to highlight that checking in with students, staff and family members around their own wellbeing is really important. And we can do that throughout the course of the entire recovery plan. And it's a great point to keep checking in on as well. I'd love to hear from you, once again. Protective factors are an important part of recovery. It's also a strength in the school community that we might use when we are managing critical incidences. So I'd love to hear if your school has any qualities that help create a safe and supportive space for your students, staff or families. And that's not just in critical incident management, but in general.

The reason that I really wanna hear about what your school does, and the strength of your school, is it's a really exciting time again to lend ideas, but also when we are managing critical incidences, what we look at is using the, it's strengths that already exist within the school. And even as your Be You consultants when we're working with the school, we provide support and advice. But we also ask what the school already has in place. And we build from that nourishment and that great anchoring that school already has. So if you wanted to share in the chat box, that would be great. And we'll might come back to your ideas in a, in a little minute. So these are the four key actions summed-up. I'd also like to point your direction to the learning domain in our Be You framework, and that's responding together. If you found that some of this content resonated with you, the learning domain in the framework, responding together, really recognises the elements that are in place when responding and recognising the impact of an incident, and what a school and educator can do together and on an individual level as well.

Your school's preparedness, aside from having a plan, can really build and implement your your preparedness to responding to such incidences. So I'm gonna leave this question in your mind to think about your school's preparedness. And on an individual level, if there are things that you want to do, or if you have any creative ideas, you might like to write them down on a notepad and bring them to your staff

meetings or connect with your colleagues about this concept of school preparedness as well. I want to highlight that staff self-care is really vital and is a key action for preparedness. Looking after ourself, as an educator, can be a really protective strategy for when we are managing challenging situations.

So if you want to learn more about Be You, we encourage you to engage with Be You, and keep up-to-date. If your learning community isn't already implementing Be You, or a Be You learning approach, you can do so by registering online, and you can get started, and access support from your Be You consultant. The Be You links popped in your, in the chat box, and we will be able to follow that link if you'd like to register. On behalf of the Be You New South Wales and national team, we would like to thank you for your care and dedication you offer students on a daily basis. We have enjoyed connecting with you. We value your insights, your experience and your knowledge. And we stand in awe and admiration of all the work that you do on a daily basis, and particularly when managing such uncertain and unnerving times.

Nicole Flatley

Thanks, Jo. Yeah, and thanks for your chat box contribution as well. Some amazing things coming through and sorry, we didn't get to them all, but wonderful contributions there.

So thanks for your time.

End of webinar.