

Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

Critical Incidents: community-based recovery in primary schools

Presented by Melinda Phillips (headspace) and Joyce Tam (headspace)

Melinda Phillips

Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us for our breakout session today: 'Critical incidents, community-based recovery in primary schools'.

The keynote session yesterday focused on the importance of a planned response to critical incidents in uncertain times and provided us all with some fantastic food for thought. And we look forward to unpacking some of the themes from that presentation for primary schools in our session today. We're conscious, as Amy mentioned, that we're currently working in schools in really complex and uncertain times. And so, our thoughtful and measured responses to critical incidents can be even more important than ever.

My name is Melinda Phillips. I'm a Be You education consultant with the New South Wales headspace schools team. And it's great to be here with Joyce Tam, a senior clinical consultant on our team.

Would you like to share a bit about yourself, Joyce?

Joyce Tam

Thanks, Melinda. It's great to be here today. I am a psychologist for almost 20 years and have worked with children and young people in private practice, non-profit and government organisations in the community and education settings.

So, before we start, I'd just like to acknowledge that Melinda and I are meeting at the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and pay our respects to the Elders past and present. And as an initiative with national reach, we would like to extend our respects to Elders in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia.

And today we have people joining us from all over the country. So please do feel free to share the land that you're joining us from today by adding the name of the country that you're running in the chat box. Our moderators will also be sharing a link in the chat to the map of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and

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Torres Strait Islander studies, which can help if you would like to know which land or country that you're on.

And 'Always Be You', it's a suite of resources within Be You to assist learning communities, to consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. And we recognise the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development of these resources. And we are also sharing a link to these resources with you just now in the chat box.

So just talking a little bit more about Be You. So, for those who don't know about Be You or haven't been to one of our virtual conferences before, Be You is a national mental health initiative for educators and is the organiser of this conference. And it is led by Beyond Blue, in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and headspace.

And Be You is completely free and available to every educators in early learning services and schools across Australia. And Be You also empowers educators to support children and young people, social, emotional wellbeing, and their own mental health. It offers educators online, professional learning, fact sheets, online events, and also other resources. And as well as learning communities with equipped with tools and processes to implement a whole school learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing.

The discussion throughout the conference will also be highlighting some of the Be You resources, tools and professional learning. Just to show you how Be You can support a whole school in a whole service approach to mental wellbeing.

Melinda Phillips

Thanks, so much for telling us a bit more about Be You, Joyce, and recent events have certainly really reinforced that need to have a whole school or whole early learning service plan toward mental health and wellbeing. And this conference covers three themes over 10 sessions over the two days. And today is our second day of the program.

And these themes are around mental health and wellbeing as a whole community approach. And this is important because we know that the most effective approach to mental health prevention and promotion is one that involves that whole community. So, children and young people and their families, the leaders in schools, teachers in schools and other staff as well, and the whole wider community too.

The second theme is around prepare and take care, which is looking at critical incidents in these uncertain times. And finally taking the opportunity to have a look at what are those benefits for building a strong family and community partnerships? Most of the sessions in these two days are aimed at a particular learning stage. So, either early learning settings, primary or secondary, and this session with Joyce and I today is relevant for primary school settings.

Joyce Tam

Thanks, Mel. So, we always want to create a safe space when we learn together. And whether this is online or face to face, and we have a shared commitment to learning together. And this means we take care to only share stories in the chat that are appropriate to share and respecting people's confidentiality and privacy.

And in addition, today's topic is a big one. Critical incidents impact on all of us as members of school communities. And at times some of the topics can trigger different emotions or take us by surprise. So please do take care of yourself throughout this presentation. And afterwards be sure to do something nice for yourself, perhaps taking yourself outside for a short walk or just taking a five-minute break to start and finish your coffee.

And reach out for any additional support, you do need that from a colleague, a friend or family member. And remember that Beyond Blue also have a range of support resources that are available, and the details

are on their website.

Melinda Phillips

Thanks, Joyce. And I really liked that reminder to look after yourself, both now and also afterward. And so, Joyce, what will we be covering today?

Joyce Tam

Thanks Mel. So, in today's session, we will be unpacking the impacts of critical incidents, our members of our primary school communities. And first and foremost, our students, but also families and staff. We'll also be exploring some of the practical strategies to manage critical incidents. And finally, Mel will be discussing on how to prepare, respond, and recover as a community.

And we also invite your contribution and we love to see what and hear from you via chat box here. So please do feel free to ask any questions or share your thoughts and comments throughout the session. And our moderators will also continue to share some relevant links and resources to guide you through specific learnings through our session today.

Melinda Phillips

Thanks Joyce and look, we hear that term critical incident talked about all the time, but what do we actually mean by a critical incident?

Joyce Tam

Well, Mel, so the World Health Organization shares this definition of a critical incident and this may occur within the primary school or outside from it. And these challenging events can include a death in the community, an accident or serious injuries or natural disasters, just name a few and we'll know that children and young people, school staff and families can all be impacted by a critical incident. And their experience can naturally be very different from one another, depending on the incident and on a range of related personal and environmental factors.

And in addition, not everyone responds to critical incident in the same way. So critical incidents may be overwhelming or threatened to overwhelm each individual's coping capacity and also coping capacities of the learning community as a whole. So, when someone has an experience that overwhelms their ability to cope, we call this trauma. And Emerging Minds has a great set of resources and videos on the definition of trauma and a link has been shared in the checkbox there.

Melinda Phillips

Thanks, Joyce. That's great. So, could you take us through what might be some of the impacts of a critical incident, especially as they impact on our primary school children?

Joyce Tam

Sure, Mel. And this leads us into the first part of our session today. We will be exploring some of the reactions that children may experience following a critical incident.

Melinda Phillips

Great. Thank you. And as educators, we're really well-placed to notice any changes within our students as they occur. And we know that children can react in a number of ways to critical incidents. We've shared a poll on this slide to gather what your experience has been in this context too, because we know the wealth of experience that's joining us today. And so, as educators, what changes do we often first notice in our students? Is it feelings, physical reactions, thoughts, or perhaps student's behaviour?

And feel free to take a couple of moments to answer and we'll share the results of this poll in a moment. And having a little look, it didn't take long for nearly 90% of respondents. Thank you for responding to tell us about behaviour. And that makes a lot of sense to us too, because behaviour of course can be the most visible of these reactions, especially in that primary school context. And Joyce, I'll now hand back to you just to tell us a little bit more about what are these children's reactions that we might see after a critical incident.

Joyce Tam

Thanks, Mel. So, as we heard in keynote yesterday, children may react to critical incidents in a range of ways. and these can be normal and natural responses. And for most children, they will resolve in short term. As you can see from this slide here, children may experience physical reactions and body aches and things like headaches and stomach aches, which are quite common to the distress.

And cognitively children may also seem to be a bit more preoccupied or distressed and on an emotional level, children may appear to be a little bit more anxious than usual and you may also notice a change with their behaviour also.

So, for example, they may no longer enjoy an activity as much as they do before. And these reactions are usually quite short lived, and they are likely to resolve with time.

Melinda Phillips

Thank you, Joyce. And I think for some children, we might see a more significant reaction or response. Could you tell us a little more about that?

Joyce Tam

Yeah, sure. So, for some children, we may see a moderate to a severe response to a critical incident. And as educators, we have actually very well placed to actually notice some of these changes. And so, their responses may last a bit more longer and be more severe or may impact on the child's potential to really learn and participate at a school. And also, when students do experience these reactions and responses, we call this trauma response, which we will in turn explore a little bit more in further details in just a moment.

Melinda Phillips

Great.

Joyce Tam

So, Mel, we've got this slide here, which is showing some of the traumatic impacts that children may experience and these impacts may be more severe and have a long, more longer lasting impact as what we've discussed before compared to the milder reactions that we've just talked about in the previous slide. So physically, children may be looking more tired in class, or have difficulty concentrating and focusing. And that's possibly because of due to the lack of sleep or the poor sleep quality that they've been having as well. The cognitive capacity may also be impacted, and you may observe children being quite forgetful and distracted.

Emotionally, you may also notice that there's been some mood swings or mood changes. And in terms of the behaviour, you may also notice a bit more risk-taking behaviour or withdrawal behaviour. And this can go either way. Yeah. Other things that you may notice would be that children may regress and behaving in a more younger way or have difficulty separating from their caregivers. And they may seem to be a little bit more withdrawn or isolating themselves when they can. And so, from a learning perspective, we may also see a decline functioning at school.

And if you're interested in learning a little bit more in this area, the Emerging Minds Community Trauma Toolkit is a fantastic resource and contains more information about trauma and impacts on children.

Melinda Phillips

Thanks, Joyce. And thanks for telling us a little bit more about trauma in children. And I was wondering if you could comment briefly around grief too.

Joyce Tam

Sure, Mel. And look, some students whilst going through a critical incident, there may also experience grief after a critical incident and because of the losses that they have just experienced. And this may be a loss of a loved one. But it can also be due to other losses as well. So, things like including loss of home or belongings or pets amongst many others.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. And so, what can we as educators do to support children after a critical incident?

Joyce Tam

Yes. Well, Mel, I guess noticing how children's actually coping is one of the foremost important steps that we can take. So, if we do notice a child experiencing some of the responses that we have just shared on this slide and the previous slide, our connection to the student and our classroom routines can be very important for the child to cope with the trauma reactions and responses. And also, what we can do is starting to collect some data on what we're seeing.

So, for example, using the BETLS observation tools that is available on Be You and share our concerns with someone on the wellbeing team who can then help to make a decision about what the next steps to take.

Melinda Phillips

Great, thank you. And there's some really great steps that you've just mentioned that we can take. So, we can work to stay connected with each student, we can maintain our classroom routines, we can document what we're seeing and when we need to, we can reach out to those wellbeing team members for a little bit of extra support.

Joyce Tam

Absolutely, Mel.

Melinda Phillips

And before we talk about the other steps that we can take on this slide, it's really important to acknowledge that educators have often been impacted by the critical incident too. And this means that we can be having some of those same reactions ourselves. We need to take good care of our own health and take steps to look after ourselves too and reach out for help if we need it so that we can continue to support our students.

And Joyce, you've mentioned a couple of really good things that we can do. Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

Joyce Tam

Yeah, sure, I guess some of the things that we can look into about supporting children is that, you know, whilst we've been sort of working on our relationships with children all this time, and building on the social and emotional skills, this is really the time where this hard work really pays off. And we can draw upon

some of those skills and work to strengthen them. And we give children that opportunity to talk about the feelings and encouraging them to practise the emotional regulation strategies.

We can also focus on the process of learning, as well as the actual learning itself to help students to resettle back into the routine. And some of the things that we can consider would be building some movement breaks or brain breaks so that we can have this thoughtful approach about things like homework, what is necessary. And then providing some opportunities for students to engage in more enjoyable activities. And you know, building that social connections with one another.

And I guess the other thing, Mel, that we can also consider would be sort of the parent and carer support for children, which is another vital strategy to assist children in coping after critical incident. So, in Be You, we have the family partnership domain, which has some terrific ideas about engaging parents. And that is heart of this, it's really about working together to support children, and sharing that observation and information with each family and being conscious of that experience, that they too might have had due to this critical incident.

We can also provide quality information and providing that consistently over time from resources such as Beyond Blue, Kids Helpline, and other helpful resources which are available on how to best support the child and so that we can facilitate that opportunities for families to connect with us or with other families at the school too.

Melinda Phillips

Great.

Joyce Tam

Yeah. Also, I guess some children may need that extra support after a critical incident. And you know, we've spoken about that critical...the trauma reactions and responses after a critical incident and also about grief earlier on.

So, in consultation with the wellbeing team, we can look into referrals to the specialist support such as the school counsellors or psychologists, guidance officers, and other external professional who can offer their support to parents and carers, and so that the best support can be put in place for the students, so they are well taken care of.

Melinda Phillips

Great.

Well, Joyce, thank you so much for that overview of children's reactions and responses or those potential reactions, I guess, to critical incidents and what they can experience and how we can support them. And now we're moving on to the next part of our presentation.

Joyce Tam

Thanks, Mel. So, the next part of our presentation will be recapping on what the keynote and review some of the key areas of the critical incident management plan and why they are so important.

Melinda Phillips

Thanks, Joyce. So, can you tell us a little bit more about critical incident management?

Joyce Tam

Yeah, sure, Mel. So, the most effective way to respond to and recover from a critical incident in a primary school setting really involves having a planned and structured approach.

So, by having a planned and structured approach, this really allows us to provide a supportive, caring response that considers the mental health wellbeing of the whole school community. And it offers a degree of safety and security, as the key personnel are supported in that moment in the decision making, by making these thoughtful and considered plan prior at an earlier time. And the community also knows that we have a plan in place, and that's going to be enacted, and this knowledge is actually really protective for members of the community, should a critical incident occur.

Melinda Phillips

So, it sounds like having a plan can be really important, especially if as a community, we're feeling pretty overwhelmed at the time. Can you tell us a little bit more about what might be involved with a plan?

Joyce Tam

Sure, and that's right. So, having a typical quality, critical incidents plan can contribute to reducing further risk. It does promote that connectedness within the school community. And it also encourages help seeking and supports the community. And when this plan is enacted, it will be enacted as a whole school level with key people already identify and prepare for these essential roles.

So, all staff will have a role to play, which include things like modifying classroom routines and structures, monitoring and supporting of students and communicating with individual families and also looking after themselves, which is really important. And we'll briefly go through preparedness response and recovery in just a moment before we share a case study about how our primary school actually managed in a critical response base.

Melinda Phillips

Thanks, Joyce. That's great. So, let's have a look at this first step, and that's talking about preparedness, and what we need to take note of when we're preparing for a critical incident response.

Joyce Tam

Sure. So now firstly, it's really important to create a plan that involves key stakeholders. So, assigning various roles to staff members should a critical incident occur, and also having in mind to have regular reviews of this plan also. So, in our work, we have seen how critical incident plan planning process can uncover a whole range of important considerations that can then be organised and considered prior to them being needed.

And in addition, a plan creates that structure and really helps people to feel that sense of control, which then in turn helps to reduce that stress and pressure that comes with that sudden and dramatic change for the community.

So, the critical incidence response pattern should also include things like details of contact numbers of the emergency See response team or any other key relevant stakeholders, and also identifies this first set of actions that needs to be taken. And you've got tasks allocated with any contingency plans in place should these occasions do occur.

So, for example, if the critical incident happened during the school holiday, or yeah, or if the incident happened on site. And now the important aim about this critical incident plan is how can we actually return back to the norm? So, restoring some of that sense of routine as soon as possible and to ensure monitoring and supportive structures can be put in place as well. And we also need to review the emergency and critical incident manage plan regularly too as what we've said at the beginning, and that's really to sort of adapt for things like staff changes, or if there's new things in place, and really, to stay up to date with the content and also the location of the plan is actually really important.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah, look, I can see how that would be a really practical consideration. We need to know where the plan is, where it's stored, that's great. And we've shared a reflective question on this next slide, what's the most important part of your school's critical incident plan?

And please feel free to share what you think in the chat box. And if you're not necessarily at the moment across the details of your school's plan, if you could share with us what you think is the most important part of a school incident plan, that would be terrific as well.

And Joyce, as our participants take some time to put their comments in, can you share what you think with this question?

Joyce Tam

Sure, absolutely, Mel. So, I guess in summary, I think all parts are important and preparedness is really the key. So, during a critical incident, there are oftentimes of uncertainties amongst that circumstance. And also, the impacts can sometimes be quite complex.

So, having a clear and concise critical incident management plan can really provide that overarching framework for preparing, responding to and recovering from a critical incident which is the central part of a school's critical incident plan. And also having a good understanding and recognising the impacts of a critical incident is actually a really vital first step in this process.

So, with this understanding, educators can then plan a response that creates an environment that promotes that recovery. And children can then be provided with opportunities to express how they are actually feeling and navigating through those tricky moments and then re-settling back into their routine that is predictable and supportive.

And I guess, importantly though, having a critical incident plan that you and your school will be well placed to manage a critical incident if this do come to unfortunate circumstances. And this is why reviewing regular reviews and having those up-to-date plans would be an integral part of this process.

Melinda Phillips

Thank you, Joyce. And we've had a few great comments shared as well. One from Carol Kalin who said, "Roles and responsibilities and communication strategies."

Joyce Tam

Wow, yes, that's absolutely very, very important, particularly with communication.

Melinda Phillips

Having those planned beforehand makes such a difference, because you're not trying to figure out, in the moment, how to communicate. And also, Kathy Smith has shared, "Actually having a clear plan that's regularly updated."

Joyce Tam

Absolutely. And we can't stress enough having that clear plan and updating that plan as you go, because things at school do change over time, and they change relatively quickly. So, updating that plan is actually quite crucial as part of that process. So, thank you for sharing.

Melinda Phillips

And Emma Louise has commented that every staff member should know who their response team is.

Joyce Tam

Yes, absolutely. So, that response team would be the first person that you may want to go to should a critical incident occur. So that's a fantastic point there.

Melinda Phillips

And finally, from Steve. Thanks, Steve. A clear sequence of events or tasks to address to ensure that nothing is missed.

Joyce Tam

Absolutely. So sometimes it might even be important to just write down a set of lists of tasks to undertake and ensuring that we have actually covered most of those tasks as well. So, thank you Steve for sharing that.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah, great. Thank you so much, that's great. And Joyce, we've now spoken about preparing for a critical incident, but could you tell us a little bit more about what we do if it actually happens and we are responding to a critical incident?

Joyce Tam

Sure, Mel. So, I guess the first step to undertake and to address would be the immediate health, welfare and safety of everyone involved, and also those who are being affected by the critical incident. And we also need to start working through the critical incident plan with your designated team and getting in touch with any appropriate education bodies or authorities in line with your policies and procedures.

And also, trying to identify potentially vulnerable people in your community who may be students, staff or family. And that would probably be need that little bit of extra support and help. And really making sure that support is available. And also, not just to those people, but to people across the board as well for students, staff and families. And as well as this, you might want to also consider providing some general support and help seeking contacts for the community so that they too will be able to seek support if that's needed as well.

Melinda Phillips

That's a great idea. And some of those points are really important. And thinking through those vulnerable people is such an important step. Is there anything else that you'd like us to consider when we're thinking about responding?

Joyce Tam

Absolutely, Mel. So, I think we've touched on this probably in our comments here as well. So prioritising communication is also another vital step. So, and this may sometimes feel like an extra task or a little bit more redundant, but it is actually really crucial that the team continues to deliver that effective and appropriate communication to all those who have been impacted. It's not just about communicating about the critical incident, but also providing that ongoing information and sources of help for students, staff and family. And that's actually vital.

And continuing to encourage that help seeking messaging across all members of the community when it's needed. And after the incident, also, having a debrief is actually really supportive as well for the team. And finally, we can also look into continue to monitor the students and staff while being after the critical incident, as well as providing some of that wellbeing support when required as we head towards recovery.

Melinda Phillips

Great, thank you. And all of those things that you've just covered, it really speaks to the importance of what you mentioned about us being prepared so that we can be across all of those tasks if we are faced with them in recovery and in responding to a critical incident. And I guess, now, if we talk about moving into that next stage toward recovery for our community after an incident, what would you like to share about that?

Joyce Tam

Sure, Mel. So, following a critical incident, it is really important to remember promoting that engagement in learning, and whilst offering children opportunities to really express how they feel. And we also want to work in ways that are flexible, relaxed, and at a slower pace, and adapting that learning activities when necessary and appropriate. And as we mentioned earlier on, we want to create that sense of safety at school and provide ways for children to express their feelings, whether they are fears or other reactions that may come up during a critical response. And staying connected with the children in the family is actually a real priority.

And we can use a range of ways to keep that connection going in communication. And also, making sure that these communications are timely and communicating in an honest way so that we understand what we're going through as a whole community, and also maintaining that trusting relationship. Some of the things we also want to consider would be re-establishing some of the routines, even though some of these new - can be a new routine and this helps to provide that sense of normality and stability for everyone. Not just for the student but across the whole learning community, including students, staff, and families.

Melinda Phillips

Great. So, we're hearing really loud and clear about the importance of routines and the importance of communication, which is terrific. And what about any ongoing support for the community?

Joyce Tam

Yes. So, we also want to continue to provide support that we've offered in the response phase and retaining some of the focus on communication channels and emotional support for students.

And we can do this in a range of age-appropriate ways and supports, and that could include thinking about individual work or group work, peer mentoring sharing some stories and we can also think outside the square and also putting in a bit of that creativity you're in as well with art and music, craft and social-emotional skills building. And these can be both on formal and informal interactions and interventions.

And finally, we can also look into, again, providing that continuing checking with students, staff, and family around their wellbeing, and also offer access to support us as required.

Melinda Phillips

Great, yeah. That continuing check-in, I think is really important.

And now we're going to move into talking about a case study that involves some materials that may be upsetting or trigger emotional responses. It's about a car accident with a school parent. So please feel free to take care of yourselves or reach out for additional support within your school structure, if you do need to.

And please note, we've changed the content of the case study slightly and also changed names and some details just for the purpose of our discussion today. And the case study that Joyce is going to take us through is covering off on those first two steps. So, the preparedness and the response stages of a critical incident.

Joyce Tam

Thanks, Mel. So, a case study that I would like to share today involves a primary school parent who was unfortunately injured in a motor vehicle accident that had occurred in the morning before school at an interaction near the school grounds. So, the mother was actually quite well known to the staff team and also to the parent community because of what the contribution of the volunteer work that she's done around the school and also for other local events.

Melinda Phillips

OK, so how did the Be You team become involved in this one?

Joyce Tam

Sure, Mel. So, we, as we know that the Be You team are available to provide support for primary schools following critical incidents. So, we were initially contacted and notified by the school principal about this critical incident who requests the support for the school community.

Melinda Phillips

And what happened following that notification?

Joyce Tam

Sure. So, when firstly, you know, we contacted the school and the school was actually really well prepared. So, they had an emergency response team and a critical incident management plan already in place. And the Be You team was first made contact with school.

And then we worked collaboration with the emergency response team, which included the principal, the system principal, a wellbeing coordinator, and education support staff member who was first aid trained and also a school counsellor.

Melinda Phillips

Great, that was a really good team and they sound like they had a plan in place. So that's...

Joyce Tam

Yeah, they were very organised.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah, great. And so, can you take us through how Be You provided support to this school as they manage the response?

Joyce Tam

Sure. So, the principal Jane and her team, again, they were very organised and beyond - and Be You provided some of the secondary consultation support. So, Jane let us know that all the immediate health welfare and physical safety concerns were taken care of and that the school was already implementing the first steps of their critical incident management plan. So, the roles were already assigned to staff members as part of the critical incident plan and the staff roles include initiating, coordinating, and reporting the critical incidents response to relevant bodies and parties.

And some were assigned to connecting and monitoring the children's reactions and also connecting and communicating with the parent body. Be You then provided some consultations on how to inform the community and communicate about this critical incident. And this happened after the principal consulted with the family. Following that, Jane also asked Be You for some support around identifying and supporting

students.

So, with the school team, Be You started identifying groups of people in the community who might have been affected by this incident. And these groups include any students and families or staff members who might have witnessed the accident or being at the scene. We've also looked into students, staff, and members of the community who knew the parent and the family quite well because they may also require a bit of extra support there.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah, that makes sense.

Joyce Tam

Yeah. And we also identify classmates of the students involved and also other vulnerable students and staff who may be concurrently experiencing other mental health or social stresses and who have been exposed to the news of this incident. And I guess, whilst doing that and talking through the different groups, you know, Jane really found that actually quite helpful in guiding, to identify who of the school community may need sort of that further extra bit of support or that informal check-in. So really guys, how they will actually continue following on that critical incident plan.

The other thing we also looked into is actually exploring some of the considerations and mapping out the support for the school community with Jane and her team. And they really took steps to put this in place. And some of these supports include continue checking in and monitoring of the vulnerable students and staff. We've also talked about this, before in our previous couple of slides ago, about slowing down the pace of the classroom structure and routine.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah.

Joyce Tam

So, they put this in place with some movement breaks and brain breaks in between.

Melinda Phillips

Great.

Joyce Tam

Yeah. And also, the other thing that we've sort of spoken about was facilitating opportunities for staff to get together - just for that collegial support and that peer support. And things like a morning tea can actually do a bit of wonder in this area. And also continue to check in with staff who may have been impacted by the critical incident as well.

And I guess the other thing we've also looked into would be sort of mapping out, and together, work in collaboration with the emergency response team. It's about considering mapping out services and referral pathways for students and staff who may require that further extra support. And also looking at resources and support for parents and carers, because as they support the children as well, they, too, may also need some of that support.

Melinda Phillips

Oh, well, thank you so much, Joyce, that's been such a comprehensive look at some of the different parts that make up a preparedness and then a response to a critical incident. So, thank you for that.

And I guess the only question I've got it is: What happens then after that immediate and short-term support

has been put in place and has happened?

Joyce Tam

Sure, so I guess, Mel, depending on the needs of the school community, Be You would be able to provide some follow-up consultation, support for the school as they head towards their recovery. And in this particular circumstance, for Jane and her school team and they were marvellous, we provided some check-in contacts, as the school headed back towards recovery...

Melinda Phillips

Great.

Joyce Tam

...just to see how things are tracking for them.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah that's excellent. That's really good. And before we head to some questions, we wanted to leave you with four actions that you can take with you today, even amongst the changing circumstances that schools are finding themselves in at the moment.

Joyce Tam

Yes, thanks, Mel. So...and firstly, I guess we can't miss this one, it's really about having an up-to-date plan which is really crucial. And look, secondly, we want to prioritise our continual learning as individuals, as staff team and across the school community, and we want to learn about mental health and wellbeing from Be You and other evidence-based sources. And we also want to learn a little bit more about trauma-informed practices, and also learn from our experiences of being in a critical incident, and how we've responded.

The other thing we also want to provide is a responding learning environment for students too, so that when a critical incident do occur, and unfortunately they will at some point, we learn how to provide ongoing support to those who need it whilst ensuring that children and young people have the opportunity to process what happen in a safe and supportive manner.

And also, thirdly, we want to embed some supportive structures in place and processes and relationships in everyday school life. We are actually doing this quite well in schools, but sometimes we can also make it a priority, and we want to engage students through maintaining that sense of safety and belonging, and offering that support, flexible learning opportunity, and really also to support staff too through a genuine concern about their health and wellbeing.

And we also want to support families through multiple opportunities to connect and access support through schools and also other health-seeking avenues. So, what we really wanted to see is a healthy community - although under these really rough circumstances - that it contains that distress and differences, and it will be able to help itself out, but also identify when to reach out for external support when it's needed.

Melinda Phillips

Great.

Joyce Tam

Yeah. And I guess the other thing also, and this is really vital, is that remembering that both you and your colleagues may also be impacted too. So, it's really important to look after your wellbeing and access support if you need to - so finding ways to cope with stress and connecting and spending time in a positive

way with other people and asking for help if that's needed is all important practices. So, being comfortable asking and giving that support really reduces any fear around health seeking in workplaces and is a really crucial part in building that supportive culture across the school community.

And I guess finally, Mel, we want to focus on collaboration with the community. So, yeah, with both relevant organisations and people across learning community, and I guess more broadly, when preparing for and responding to a critical incident.

So, in quieter times, what we want to do is actually normalise and signing up some of those collaborations and agreements with community organisations and professionals. And also, we want to have input from our educators, our community at all levels of the planning involving students and parents as well in response and recovery efforts. And so, by having this clear referral pathway, both within the school and external from the school, this is actually going to empower everyone to play a part, but still act within the scope of the role. And this really helps people to feel safe and supported with this whole school approach.

Melinda Phillips

I think that's great: that idea of being able to act within the scope of our roles, but still to be doing our part - that's how we all want to be. So, that's a great point. Thank you.

Joyce Tam

Absolutely, Mel.

Melinda Phillips

And we've covered a great deal in this session. Firstly, by looking at some of the reactions that children and young people might have, once they've experienced a critical incident including some of those traumatic reactions and responses. And followed by a review of critical incident management and how we might go about that. And we think it's really worthwhile to stop for a moment and just think of any learnings to take away from all that Joyce has shared with us today. Note them down but we'd also really love you to share them in the chat box too.

And, of course, we've all experienced, and are recently experienced and are still experiencing the effects of the pandemic, on school education here in Australia, and the time will come in the future for us to be able to reflect on that experience as well. But, for now, if there's something from the session that seems to be relevant and appropriate for your school, please do capture it somewhere, so that you can action it in the future. I know that some of the things that I'm really conscious of have been that idea of being really clear about roles and responsibilities, and tasks, so that we know exactly what's expected of us and don't have to do that thinking in the moment, that it's actually already been thought-through and considered at a time that's much calmer.

And I really like Joyce's point too, about reaching out and making those relationships with community agencies now - particularly now to, to support our families and who might need a little bit of extra support given them what they've been through in the last few months. But that proactive approach, to already having relationships in place, puts us in really good stead if and when a critical incident might unfortunately occur. And thank you to those that have shared some of their learnings.

So, Kathy suggested that, she's going to go back and check out their plan status at school and see where it's up to, and Rachel shared, to be clear on her role within the schools critical incident response. And we find that to be really useful too, to know what our own role is within the response plan.

Joyce Tam

Absolutely, Mel.

Melinda Phillips

And Colleen has shared, Joyce, a whole school approach plus to review and collaborate.

Joyce Tam

Absolutely. And that's so important to be able to have all parties being able to be part of this plan, so everybody is actually quite clear on what the role's that they have, and that collaboration really provides some really great and excellent conversations and considerations, during a critical incident and prior to a critical incident.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you. Thank you for those great comments. And now we might move on, we've got one that's just popped in from Suzanne, slowing down the classroom routines and assigning roles to multiple staff, not all one staff member.

Joyce Tam

Absolutely, and it's vital that we actually share out this role, during a critical instance response, so that people would actually know that this is the part of the task that I'm responsible for, while other people... other tasks are being taken care of, and that gives people a peace of mind as well during a critical incident. So, thank you for sharing.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah, that's a great point, thank you. And thanks, also, Joyce so much for your presentation. That's just been terrific.

Are there any final words that you'd like to leave us with, before we take a couple of questions?

Joyce Tam

Sure, Mel. So, I guess a proactive and informed learning community, it's more likely to respond effectively to a critical incident, and you can be informed of all the potential impacts of the critical incident. But also, remember that, you know, monitoring reactions, and all those information, can really guide you about a child's need for additional support, should a critical incident occur. And also, offering support to your community including those through your wellbeing team, or local health services, and also consider the impacts on families, and of course, as educators, how you can take care of yourself and of your colleagues, too, during these uncertain times.

And also, a final comment I would like to leave with all of us today is that: Despite of this, you know, unprecedented pandemic times, you know, we can...we really have truly witnessed the agility, the resilience, and the adaptability of our educators and of schools that we can be truly, truly proud of, and to this, we really thank you for all the work that you've actually been doing for your school, and for your students, and for the school community.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah, thank you very much. As Joyce said, we have certainly witnessed it ourselves, and it's inspiring and a privilege to be able to support in some small ways too. Thank you, and I guess one of our important messages is to keep taking care of yourself as well as taking care of the students and all of those other people around you.

And we've now got just a couple of minutes to take questions from the chat box. And one's come through from Carol, which is just asking Joyce, "how do we best support staff who might be having some difficulties?"

Joyce Tam

I guess firstly, it might be sort of looking at, you know, what might be potentially or perhaps having a simple conversation, a check-in conversation, to see how things are tracking and look if...you know, and this could be an informal support, so that may be having a chat with a colleague or a family or friend.

But on other avenues, it might be that, OK, so if you would like further support around this or, other perhaps, talking to someone else who might be sort of professional in this area, it might be looking at a referral to, perhaps, you know, utilising the employees' assistance program if you do have that, or even via your GP as well - so potentially getting access to that professional support, if needed.

Melinda Phillips

Great, and just to add to that, that Be You itself has a really great range of resources around wellbeing, and self-care, and some good links to some online support as well that you might like to consider sharing with others within the staff group.

Joyce Tam

Another thing - thanks, Mel - so I guess another thing that would be a good consideration is that from the Black Dog Institute, there is a really good template for self-care...templates, so a lot of educators actually find that quite helpful. It's a short one page form where you can actually put in, you know, some of the things that I could do as part of my self-care, and it divides up into sort of different compartments, you know, your physical, your emotional health, so looking at all different aspects of your own self-care. So that could be a very useful tool as well.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah, great, thanks, Joyce. And taking the time to plan to care for ourselves is really important. And Joyce, one other question, who should be on your emergency response team?

Joyce Tam

Sure, look and I guess, you know, this would... and because your school is unique, and you know best then who might be most well placed to be part of this emergency response team, I think one thing to really highlight here is that: Rather than having people or names of people on this emergency response team, it's really about looking at the roles which these emergency response team would play. And this kind of makes sense because if you're assigning a person to that particular role, and that person happens to be on leave or no longer at the school, you know, you might want someone else to fill in that role.

So, identifying the actual roles that might be needed would be probably foremost important, and then you can have, you know, a few members who can also stepping in should the first person may not be, you know, absent or may not be available. So, identifying different roles would be, I guess, the key to go, in terms of identifying who should be on the team.

Melinda Phillips

That's such a great point. Thank you, Joyce. And just a final comment, before we move into our concluding slides. Emma had shared that, "I think we need to focus on the short term and long term processes, making sure that the community do not feel forgotten, keeping communication open, and making sure we've got implementation in place for our staff, and most importantly, what our plan is." Thanks, Emma. That's such a great summary of many of the important messages that we've shared today.

Joyce Tam

Thanks, Emma. That's wonderful.

OK, so I guess before we finish our presentation today, we just really like to encourage you to continue to engage with Be You and learn more in keeping up to date with some of the tools and resources that we do have on Be You. So, if you are a learning community, and have not yet implemented the Be You whole learning community approach, we encourage you to register online, and getting started with support from a Be You consultation.

And if you're looking for resources to support you with specific needs and concerns, such as adapting to change, you're more than welcome to visit our website at beyou.edu.au And finally, keeping up-to-date with Be You resources, events, and tools, and you've got tips on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, and also we've got a Be You YouTube channel that you can subscribe to, to receive some updates on new videos or from Be You.

Melinda Phillips

Well, thank you very much again, Joyce, for your presentation today. It's been really comprehensive and left us all with a lot to think about, and to check our plans and to see what we might need to do next. And thank you, too, for joining us for this session. We really appreciate you taking time in your busy schedules, especially at the moment, to attend, and we really hope that you can take that time to look after yourselves, too.

Joyce Tam

So, thank you very much, everybody, for your time, and hope that we've provided a bit of food for thought today, and take care of yourselves.

Thank you.

End of webinar.