

Be You In Focus webinar handout: Supporting mental health following a critical incident

Thank you for your participation in the Be You In Focus event 'Supporting mental health following a critical incident' on 16 September 2019.

This handout contains:

- Quick summary of key concepts
- Reflective questions
- Resources
- Questions-and-answer section (including the critical incident management slide)
- How to register for a Be You Learning Community infographic
- Next steps
- What is the role of Be You Consultants?

Quick summary of key concepts

- A critical incident is **an event outside the range of normal experience**, one which is sudden and unexpected, makes us lose control, involves the perception of a threat to life and can include elements of physical or emotional loss.
- A critical incident can occur in any learning community, and it can impact everyone's mental health.
- There can be once-off incidents or people can be impacted through an accumulation of negative experiences.
- As an educator, you will need to work within your learning community's detailed policies and procedures, which are usually mandated by your relevant education system. These policies and procedures are designed to limit the impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, their families and yourself.

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Reflective questions to draw on with your learning communities

- Do you know where critical incident processes are stored in your learning community? Do you know how to access these in an emergency?
- Are critical incident processes updated regularly in your learning community?
- What are some actions you may need to undertake to ensure critical incident plans are current?
- Has this professional development identified any training needs for your learning community?

Resources

Please find below a selection of resources either shared during the webinar or used in preparation for the webinar.

Be You Resources

- [Be You Wellbeing Tools for You](#)
- [Be You Your Wellbeing Fact Sheet](#)
- [Educator Wellbeing \(after a natural disaster\) Fact Sheet](#)
- [Be You Action Team information](#)
- [Be You Evidence base](#)
- [Always Be You](#)
- [Professional Learning – Family partnerships](#)
- [Professional Learning – Early support](#)
- [Professional Learning – Responding together](#)
- [Grief Fact Sheet](#)
- [Trauma Fact Sheet](#)
- [Suicide Prevention and Response resources](#)
- [Suicide Response Toolkit](#)

Other recommended resources

- [Emerging Minds Community trauma toolkit](#)
- [Emerging Minds Bushfire recovery story](#)
- [Trauma, Loss & Grief Resources - for use by school counsellors and other mental health professionals associated with school communities \(V1.0\)](#)
- [Still Face Experiment: Dr. Edward Tronick](#)

Attendee questions and answers

How do we support students who show characteristics of having undergone trauma, but we're not privy to the event? Also, intergenerational trauma (secondary trauma).

It can help to know about the incident, but it is not essential to your ability to recognise the impacts of trauma and to follow up with supportive actions. We would encourage you and your staff to not see it as a hindrance, but instead to focus on how you can continue to act in a trauma informed manner promoting; consistency, shared control, calming activities, clear plans, body awareness, clear communication, etc. This includes where the impacts of trauma are of an inter-generational nature. The [Be You Trauma Fact Sheet](#) contains helpful information about supporting children impacted by trauma. Additionally, Be You's [Mindfulness](#) and [Brain Development](#) Fact Sheets contain helpful information to this topic.

I am interested in the question of adrenalin levels and their impact on behaviour as a response to trauma.

Adrenalin, and its release in a traumatised state, is a well-documented occurrence. As part of the flight/flight/freeze response, adrenalin triggers changes in the body such as increased heart rate. This in a classroom setting is bound to impact behaviour. It's also known that adrenalin reduces memory functioning. Knowing this helps us to be best informed about how we engage in retrospective discussion with young people after they display behaviours that are consistent with a trauma response that they may not fully recall doing or why. In fact, asking a student impacted by trauma why they displayed a particular behaviour typically will not be helpful, as this is a question that requires high level brain function to answer. It is much more helpful to first help the student to breathe, feel grounded, and get away from possible triggers, secondly to assist them to be aware of how they may be feeling, and only then start problem-solving about how and why to support future behaviours to be less disruptive.

I'm also concerned about the possibility of recognising externalised responses as inappropriate behaviours rather than hurting behaviours. Is there any information on this?

To be aware of how 'hurting behaviours' are often misinterpreted as solely being 'inappropriate' is an important first step. Furthermore, how an individual expresses their own distress will vary greatly from person to person. [The Be You Mental Health Continuum for Educators](#) resource helps to identifying a range of behaviours both internalising (for example, anxiety) or externalising (for example, impulsivity, aggression) that might signify they may be experiencing distress. It is important that we consider changes across a range of factors such as behaviour and emotions, relationships and learning. The BETLS observation tool can be a useful resource to identify change. Further information can be found in the [Be You Early Support domain](#).

What is the most helpful response to critical incidents – physical, therapeutic, social or community – from your experience?

There are a range of helpful activities you can do to support someone impacted by a critical incident. These include the following aims:

- Establishing safety and security. For example, leaving a fire-affected area, providing evidence that a threat is no longer present and providing reassurance to an individual they are safe.
- Supporting individuals to calm, such as reducing stress-related reactions.
- Connecting to supports and resources. For example, family, supports within your department/sector or learning community.
- Explore ways to foster coping.
- Enhance natural resilience.
- Provide support on an as-needed basis. For example, ongoing support from learning community wellbeing staff, external referrals as required.

The Be You Responding Together domain contains information about critical incident responses.

- Impact of natural disasters: Natural disasters can be stressful and traumatic for children, young people and adults, with impacts on mental health and wellbeing.
- How to provide support (after a natural disaster): Learning communities and educators play an important role in supporting children and young people after a natural disaster.
- Educator wellbeing (after a natural disaster): Looking after yourself in the event of a natural disaster is the first step to providing support to those around you.
- Grief: We all grieve. For children and young people, understanding and expressing their grief can be particularly hard.
Trauma: Trauma is the result of an event(s) that cause a child or young person to feel pushed beyond their ability to cope.

Are there any best practice guides?

There a range of resources available to educators and learning communities through the Be You Responding Together domain. Your sector or department will most likely have a plan and response for supporting learning communities affected by a critical incident. These plans typically are enacted with the aim to reduce the impact of these events, reduce further harm and promote recovery within a learning community. Other best practice guides include psychological first aid approaches to responding to critical incidents. The Australian Red Cross resource can be accessed [here](#).

Where can we find the critical incident management diagram and details on Be You site?

There's a list of critical incident-related Fact Sheets found [here](#). The two Be You Responding Together Professional Learning modules contain information about critical incident responses. The critical incident management diagram (appearing on the next page of this handout) can be found on the Be You website within the Recognise Professional Learning module.

Be You suicide postvention planning supports schools in the preparedness phase of critical incident management, preparing secondary schools with an evidence-based plan to utilise in the

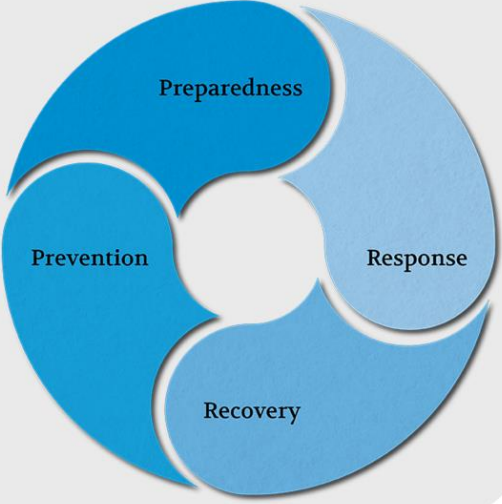
instance a suicide death impacts on their school community. Be You Consultants can support your school community in developing a plan that reflects your school cohort and needs.

For more information on these resources, or development of a plan, contact your Be You Consultant.

Critical Incident Management

A coordinated and planned response is important.

When a critical incident occurs in a learning community, it's important to have a coordinated and planned response. This is called a 'critical incident management plan'. This approach helps to minimise the effects of the incident and assist children and young people, educators and the learning community return to a normal routine as soon as possible.



What ways can you recommend for supporting staff/educators in response to a critical incident?

In your role as an educator, you'll be faced with many challenges following a critical incident, including trying to support children and young people in your learning community as well as managing your own response to the event. It can be difficult to continue your day-to-day role, trying to provide a safe, secure environment for children and young people while also managing your own wellbeing.

Tips for self-care

Taking the time to look after yourself means you'll be in better position to provide support to those around you. Here are some tips for looking after yourself:

- Maintain routines that work for you – eat well and sleep well. Your physical health impacts your emotional health.
- Know who your supports are and spend time with them. This might be friends, family or someone else at work.
- Know your limits. Supporting others can be tough, so know when to step back.
- Debrief with others at work. This can be informal or formal.
- Link with supports outside of your learning environment.

Learn more about [staff wellbeing](#) and [stress management](#) in the Be You Fact Sheets.

Most early learning services don't have ready access to onsite professional help. Planning for accessing external professional support is the best way to ensure educators' mental health and wellbeing is considered after a critical incident. There are several ways that this can be done:

- Have on hand a list of helpline numbers to reach out for support (for instance, Lifeline, Beyond Blue and others as listed on the Be You website and in [Wellbeing Tools for You](#))
- Encourage access to a GP for further professional advice.
- Regularly check in with the individual to discuss what further supports they may require either in an individual discussion or group discussions.
- Actively and regularly connect and build local professionals networks (for example, allied health professionals, EAP services) to be able to call on them if or when needed.
- Invite or seek advice from local professionals to inform quality improvement plans, including policy planning as well as include information in induction information and processes.

More information can be found in the [Educator wellbeing \(after a natural disaster\)](#) Fact Sheet.

As a teacher with pastoral responsibility for a group of 18 students, how do I recognise when my support strategies are enough/effective and who might be heading towards ongoing psychological problems?

To recognise specific behaviours, and impacts to daily functioning, children and young people may indicate the need for further assistance. The [BETLS observation tool](#) is a template for gathering and documenting information and observations about a child or young person and your particular concerns. This will help you and others highlight whether further assistance should be followed up.

I'm curious as to the different reactions that siblings might have to a specific traumatic event and what some of the differing factors might be between siblings (other than age)?

There are a range of factors that will influence the degree to which an individual will be impacted by a specific critical incident or traumatic event. These factors can vary amongst individuals, even siblings. These include internal factors such as genetic and biological (for example, brain development, sexual maturity), social (for example, support networks, connection, family environment), psychological (for example, past exposure to trauma, attachment style, perception or understanding of the event).

Responses to trauma can also be shaped by external factors such the event itself and physical location in relation to the event. All these factors can vary according to an individual's age and developmental stage – hence there are a range of factors that may shape and contribute to an individual's response to trauma. There are a range of resources available on the Be You website that explore differences in child development. These include:

- [Brain development](#): How the brain develops during childhood and adolescence has a long-lasting influence on a person's physical and mental health.

- Child development: Child development can have lasting impacts on mental health.
- Adolescent development: Adolescence is a time of rapid biological, psychological, cognitive, emotional and social change.
- Social and emotional learning: Social and emotional learning skills are essential for good mental health and wellbeing.
- Social development: Social development is about learning the skills to relate to and interact with others.
- Emotional development: Social and emotional learning (SEL) helps us understand and manage our emotions, set and achieve goals and feel good about ourselves.

Is it possible to share the link to the clip played during the webinar?

The clip is located in the Be You Responding Together domain within the Professional Learning module Recognise. You'll be required to log in to Be You to access this video.

Is there any danger of increasing children's sense of trauma by placing too much focus on an incident? At our school, a young girl died and the family carried out repeated ceremonies of commemoration over the course of two years. Subsequent to each event, there was a period of increased distress. Is that healthy or should there be intervention to close down some of those activities?

Some individuals may find memorial events important to supporting closure, whereas for others it could be distressing. If memorial events are held within a learning community, it's important that individuals are given the option to opt in or out. With children and young people, it's best to involve them and their family members with any decisions about participating in memorial events. Giving individuals the choice to attend, or not, may reduce distress for those that don't wish to engage or promote closure and healing for those for whom it's an important part of grief.

Decisions to attend can be supported with developmentally appropriate language, and information about grief, death and dying. Where possible access to support should be promoted.

Information related to grief in young people can be accessed here. Your Be You Consultant can also be a wealth of support in these circumstances. To get in contact with your Be You Consultant to discuss this further, you can log into your Be You account, click on 'your learning community', then 'supports', and your consultant will be listed there.

Can we please get a copy of the slides?

The In Focus recording and support materials including the transcript, post webinar document, Q&A, research and resources links will be provided within the Events of the Be You website.

Next steps

Not a participating Be You early learning service or school?

If your school isn't already a participating Be You Learning Community (early learning service or school), we invite you to become a registered Be You Learning Community so you are able to access the expertise of a Be You Consultant and the full suite of Be You Resources.

To participate in Be You and register as a Be You Learning Community, you'll first need an individual Be You account. This registration link will ask you to confirm an Action Team Leader and leadership support. The Action Team Leader status can change at any time and you can choose multiple Action Team Leaders. Find out more about the Action Team resources or contact your Be You Consultant whose details can be found on your Be You dashboard (once you have logged in) or use our contact page.

How to register as a Be You Learning Community



1. Register
as an individual user and verify your account

2. Log in
to your account

3. Get started
Go to your dashboard to register your learning community

4. Confirm
an Action Team Leader

5. Prepare
for contact from a Be You Consultant

You've started as a Be You Learning Community!

Want to get started on your journey?
Visit the Be You website for more information.

We are a participating Be You early learning service or school

- Keep in contact with your Be You Consultant (their details can be found on your Be You dashboard once you've logged in).
- Explore our Check in events for action teams. These can be found on the [events section](#) of the Be You website.
- **Our next In Focus event: Always Be You – Conversations and connections for mental health** (Wednesday 23 October, 1-2pm AEDT – you can [register for this event here](#))
- Subscribe to our [email updates here](#).
- Share your early learning community or school story with the [Be You team via our contacts page](#) to celebrate your learning community's commitment to mental health and to provide inspiration and encouragement to others.

What's the role of Be You Consultants?

Over 70 trained, dedicated Be You Consultants from Early Childhood Australia and **headspace** support early learning services and schools by:

- helping them to identify current strengths and areas for further development
- guiding them to relevant Be You tools and resources to support their progress towards goal-setting
- furthering their understanding of parallels with other initiatives and mandates
- regularly checking in to support continuous improvement, discuss challenges and celebrate achievements.

Every early learning service and school is assigned a Be You Consultant to support them on their journey. The support provided is likely to vary within each service or school and will be flexible based on need.