

Education and Care Services National Regulations

Part 4.2—Children's health and safety

PART 4.2—CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

Division 1—Health, safety and wellbeing of children

84 Awareness of child protection law

The approved provider of an education and care service must ensure that the nominated supervisor and staff members at the service who work with children are advised of—

- (a) the existence and application of the current child protection law; and
- (b) any obligations that they may have under that law.

Penalty: \$1000.

Note

A compliance direction may be issued for failure to comply with this regulation.

Assisting Students To Deal With An Emotionally Sensitive Community Issue

The following notes have been prepared as a broad guide to assist student service personnel when working with an educational site dealing with a critical incident that has had a direct impact on the general wellbeing of students.

From the outset it is important to acknowledge the critical incident may have some level of personal impact for an educator. Therefore consider how this may make a difference to their ability to respond to needs of students. An invitation to work alongside an educator when facilitating student discussions may be one way of providing emotional support to the educator. Ultimately the decision as to whether an educator wants a support person to “team teach” needs to rest with them.

If the educators wishes to take up the invitation discuss with teacher what may, or may not be appropriate to discuss within the context of the class group.

The following aspects require consideration:

- Is the level of concern that of students or more of adults? This will influence the level at which you need to intervene. How many students and from which classes are raising questions or making general statements?
- What options are there to support the students who are expressing interest or concerns? Is it possible to deal with these students on an individual basis as opposed to whole class activities? Is it possible to use literature-based activities with students which will help teachers to assess individual student needs?
- If the decision is to engage in a class discussion, consider the background of all students and whether there might be personal factors that might exacerbate their distress. Would participation of any particular student engage their imagination in an unhelpful manner? Is it necessary to talk with caregivers about involvement of any students for whom you hold concerns?
- If facilitating discussions, focus on sharing thoughts and feelings and talk about how this has been affecting them. Connection can be made with previous learning that will assist students to understand their reactions, eg. have they experienced any of their “early warning signs” if they have done protective behaviours. This provides an opportunity to reassure children that their reactions are understandable and to be expected given the events, which have occurred. It can also help them to appreciate that individuals are affected differently and will vary in their beliefs and attitudes about the situation.
- To counteract a sense of vulnerability, revisit school practices that contribute towards a safe environment, for example, respecting individual difference, harassment-free environment.
- Assist students to label feelings they might have. This will help them develop a sense of control over how they are feeling. Have students identify how their thoughts might be influencing their level of safety and what they can say differently to themselves

- Allow students to come up with strategies that help them feel safe. Support initiatives which strengthen personal mastery (ie normal routines and activities that help them feel good about themselves e.g. drawing, writing, opportunities for physical play). Some of these activities may even be facilitated within the classroom. Assurances of safety and protection are of the greatest importance.
- If students ask questions about what has happened, provide age-appropriate information. As far as possible clarify any misconceptions. If you do not know about certain aspects of the situation, then acknowledge this, saying that very often we are never going to know and understand everything that has happened. Deal with the facts. What do we really know? What is pure speculation?
- Identify which adults within the school setting are able to offer extra help if students are struggling with any particular aspects of the situation. Revisit the students "network". It is important that students feel they have some personal capacity to deal with the issues that may be raised for them.
- In consultation with the educator you will need to make a decision about when it is time to move on and engage in the usual learning activities. As far as possible enable the educator to work towards a return to a normal program as this gives the children structure and predictability. This will contribute to promoting a sense of safety and may need to be explicitly discussed with the educator to enable the rationale underpinning your approach to be explicit.
- Sometimes an event such as this may trigger other issues that students may have in their lives. This then has the potential to heighten their emotional responses to the present situation. Discuss with the educator and/or relevant site personnel strategies to monitor students and inform parents/caregivers of any concerns the school has.
- Ensure that you take the opportunity to talk through any issues with your colleagues and provide each other with mutual support.