Emergency management considerations for early childhood services on shared sites

This document outlines some suggestions for effective emergency management planning for services sharing sites with schools or other site users.

## Joint emergency management planning

It is strongly recommended that early childhood services and shared sites users, including schools and other education facilities, undertake emergency management planning as a joint activity. This supports the safety of the whole site during an emergency or incident and minimises the chance of miscommunication.

Gathering leadership and relevant staff together from all facilities on the site to develop or review your Emergency Management Plans helps identify areas where you may need to be aligned and where you may need to have separate approaches to manage your risks and obligations.

Discussion points may include:

* What makes each setting unique?
* What are the similarities?
* Compare risks between the plans:
  + Are there threats/situations that will only impact one facility?
  + Does one have a risk that the other is missing?
  + Is there a difference in rating for the same risk? If so, consider the reason
* What scenarios and outcomes work for both facilities?
* Have there been any changes on the site or in the local community that may impact shared or separate arrangements?
* How will disruptions to essential services impacting one or more of the facilities on the site be managed?
* Are there opportunities to share resources/facilities/costs with other site users to maximise the success of the implementation of your plan and the safety of children and your staff?
* How will you brief your staff to ensure they understand how to work with other site users in emergencies/incidents?
* How will you undertake debriefs and share lessons from drills and emergencies/incidents?

Remember that in most circumstances, the threat or danger is to the **whole** **site**, not just one of the facilities, so joint planning is crucial.

#### Evacuation points/assembly areas

When discussing your EMPs, it is also important to consider the movements of each cohort in emergencies, especially when moving to both on-site and off-site evacuation locations/assembly points.

Consider the following:

* In most circumstances, it is appropriate to use the same evacuation locations, however you may wish to consider separated zones/areas to make it easier to account for each group when conducting head checks and to manage your cohort.
* Access to the points from each site – are there any barriers or issues that need to be addressed?
* Consider shade, access to drinking water, toilets, change facilities in choosing evacuation points. These elements may be more important with a larger group and/or depending on the needs of the cohorts.
* Will there be the possibility of siblings or relatives in your cohorts trying to find each other, and how will you manage this?

#### Drills

Drills are critical for testing the arrangements for not only your own facility, but for ensuring the whole site is able to effectively respond to emergencies and incidents. Conducting joint drills can test your coordination, communication and ensure that there is no confusion as to what needs to happen when an incident or emergency impacts your shared site.

Consider the following:

* Plan your joint drills well in advance to ensure each facility has adequate notice to manage disruptions and can input into the scenario so that it fits your site context.
* Conduct your drills together and observe especially how well you communicate between facilities, how your cohorts move around the site, and how effectively the individual and collective response works for responding to the particular drill scenario.
* Conduct both separate and joint post-drill debriefs to identify areas for improvement or updates for your EMP collectively as well as individually.
* Ensure frequency and types of drills are in line with any regulatory requirements.

## Communication

Communication between shared site users and with your education community is the key to managing incidents and emergencies effectively.

Remember to keep any shared site users informed during emergencies and incidents so they can make informed decisions to maintain the safety of their cohort as well as support your response actions in an emergency.

Consider the following:

* How will each facility communicate with one another day to day as well as during emergencies? Is this documented in each EMP, including in the Communications Tree and emergency contacts?
* Some emergencies and incidents will impact just your service and cohort, but others may have implications for the safety of the whole site and other users/facilities. How will you communicate in both scenarios?
* In case of disruption to your main communication channel, such as landline, mobile or internet connectivity, have you discussed and documented alternative communication methods to ensure you can maintain contact with each facility and emergency services?
* Communicating consistently to the parent community of all education facilities on the site that you are working together on emergency management shows a united front and helps build confidence in your approach.
* Think about how to respond to questions around mingling of cohorts, including concerns about older or unfamiliar children intimidating/scaring younger children, or how new faces or changes in the daily routine could be disruptive and unsettling for some children. Responding to these questions will not only help provide a safe and inclusive environment and develop a strong education culture but will also have practical benefits during drills and real emergencies and incidents by ensuring parents and children/students are comfortable with the approach.

## Responding to emergencies and incidents

When an emergency or incident does occur, it is important that you activate your EMP and take steps to support the safety of your own cohort while also being mindful of your shared site users.

Consider the following:

* Contact other site users early to let them know the following details:
  + What has occurred,
  + What actions you are taking,
  + Who has been informed,
  + Any anticipated impacts for the whole site/other site users based on your current knowledge.
* Each site leader will assess the situation and risk and act in accordance with their own EMP and in the best interests of children/students/staff/people in their care.
* Consider if coordinated messaging during and after the event is required to minimise community confusion and provide reassurance.
* Utilise the best information available, and if you are unsure, seek advice from emergency services or QARD.

## Ongoing review and evaluation

Maintaining a strong relationship with other site users will ensure you can adapt to changes across your site and help keep your community safe for the long term.

It is recommended to meet regularly with your shared site users to review and update your plans and site arrangements, such as once per term or at key points in the year when facilities are reviewing their EMPs. It may also be worth coming together following significant events impacting one or more facilities on the site to see what could be improved.

Some questions to consider include:

* Are there any changes to the site overall or specific facilities that may impact plans, including evacuation routes or assembly areas?
* Have new threats emerged or do existing threats need to be reassessed?
* Are there any changes to the cohorts across the whole site that may impact plans?
  + Are there any new enrolments?
  + Are there any new staff/children with additional needs?
* Are the current communication approaches working?
* Have there been any lessons learned from drills or real emergencies/incidents that may impact our plans?