Responding to Intruder Threat

Guidelines for Early Childhood Services and Schools

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# ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

1.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance for schools and early childhood services in preparing for and responding to, intruder threat on site during hours of operation.

This guidance should be considered in the formulation of the Emergency Management Plan for the early childhood service or school.

This document should not be used in place of the Emergency Management Plan.

1.2 AUDIENCE

The audience for this document is early childhood services management and school leadership staff.

# background

2.1 INTRUDER THREAT

A situation involving an intruder event in an early childhood or school setting has the potential to be a significant emergency. Fortunately, violent intruder situations are rare in Australia. What has been learned from international experience is that these events do not follow a predictable pattern and therefore it is not possible to establish a single set of response procedures.

These guidelines provide strategies to prevent, mitigate and respond to intruder threat.

2.2 EFFECTS

The consequences of physical and psychological harm resulting from an intruder event can be considerable.

Where an incident occurs the effects may include:

* disruption to learning
* disruption to business continuity for staff and low workplace morale

In more serious events the effects may include:

* feeling unsafe in school surroundings leading to an impact on education
* ongoing anxiety
* parent and local community distrust of facility
* a reduction in enrolment
* poor student morale
* on-going trauma

# MITIGATION AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES

3.1 CONDUCTING A RISK ASSESSMENT

Each early childhood service and school will have a differing level of risk associated with potential intruder threat or harm. These risks will need to be considered as part of the process of formulating an Emergency Management Plan for the facility. A risk assessment for potential intruder threat should consider the culture or climate of the early childhood facility or school as well as the built or physical environment, and previous known threats or likelihood of threat.

In assessing the potential threat to your facility, consider seeking input from Victoria Police. Government schools may also seek advice from the Security and Emergency Management Division.

3.2 POSITIVE CULTURE

Fostering a positive culture within a service or school is essential to improving relationships. A climate where staff, children, and students model respect for others, engage in positive conflict resolution, resolve issues without bias and use respectful discipline strategies, will result in fewer incidents of violence within the staff and student body and also from parents and visitors to the early childhood facility or school.

3.2.1 Whole Early Childhood Service or School Interventions.

To support a positive culture, consider comprehensive early childhood service or school interventions which target:

* parental and early childhood service/school community involvement,
* inclusion of violence prevention and conflict resolution in the learning program
* peer mediation
* bullying prevention strategies
* inclusion
* valuing and respecting differences
* staff morale
* clear behavioural expectations

In the school context, examples of interventions which aim to decrease violence and promote respectful relationships include the [School Wide Positive Behaviour Support](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/swpbs.aspx) program, [Respectful Relationships](https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/Resource/LandingPage?ObjectId=2cb0472f-c903-4c2d-a053-a330df31eefe&SearchScope=All), and [Safe Schools](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/safe-schools-coalition.aspx).

3.2.2 Community

Where possible, early childhood services and schools should welcome involvement in the local community. This may include the uptake of invitations to join in community occasions and initiatives as well as encouraging community participation in events held by the early childhood facility or school.

Neighbours and key people in the community are more likely to report potential threats where positive relationships with leadership staff have been formed. Community members are less likely to threaten or instigate violence towards members of the service or school where there are existing positive associations with staff.

3.3 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Where an elevated risk has been identified, changes made to the physical environment of the facility can deter attack by potential intruders.

3.3.1. Entry points

Consider limiting entry and exit points to the facility during hours of operation. It is preferable to limit the point of entry to the administration area where visitors can be greeted and registered. Mitigating intruder threat at your facility may include ensuring external building doors can only be opened from the inside and external gates are locked (other than the gate closest to and visible to the administration area) during hours of operation. Where there is an assessed heightened risk, consideration might be given to upgrading low fencing to higher fencing in particular at the rear and sides of the property.

Assess the surrounding environmental area and consider whether there are any unique vulnerabilities to threat which require particular mitigation strategies.

3.3.2. Visibility

Where an elevated risk has been assessed, review the positioning of landscaping, equipment and temporary structures in outdoor areas that may limit visibility or view, creating potential hiding places. Where possible, staff should clearly be able to observe what is taking place in the grounds. Consider the types of plants along the fence lines and within the grounds area as well as adjacent to buildings.

Consider additional equipment such as security cameras and signage, the presence of which can deter negative behaviour. Government schools can access advice within the [Security Risk Management](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/pages/security.aspx) section of the School Policy Advisory Guide.

3.3.3 Territoriality

In the context of schools, a visible staff presence on site at the beginning and end of the day, as well as during break times, can discourage illegitimate use of the grounds by others while students are attending.

Consider whether your school may benefit from a uniform policy for students. A uniform or similar identifier can easily distinguish students from a visitor on site. Outside school gates, students in uniform can be easily identified allowing community members to watch out for the children.

Schools and early childhood facilities should consider some means of identifying staff (e.g. a name badge or lanyard). Again, these measures may increase the likelihood that a visitor on the grounds will be quickly recognised.

# pREPAREDNESS

4.1 MONITOR LOCAL CONDITIONS

Intruder events occurring in government schools are reported through the Incident Reporting Information System (IRIS). These alerts are shared with surrounding government schools, early childhood services, Catholic and Independent schools through Departmental regional offices.

Facilities may also set up a watch zone within the [Vic Emergency](https://emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/) app for alerts in the local area in relation to major incidents which involve police operations.

4.2 THREAT ASSESSMENT

Monitor, assess and report to Victoria Police where necessary:

* threats made either directly or indirectly against facilities or individual children, students and staff;
* students, staff or any adults acting suspiciously on or near school grounds; or
* custodial disputes that threaten to escalate

4.3 EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANNING

As part of the response to new threats or newly identified vulnerabilities, consider reviewing the risk assessment component of your Emergency Management Plan in consultation with emergency management staff in your region or Victoria Police.

Early childhood services and schools may find it beneficial to ask for input from staff, students (in the case of schools) and the parent body in relation to the identification of vulnerabilities and the development of responses.

Finally, when developing your emergency management plan remember to give consideration to shelter-in-place locations and the capacity to lock doors.

4.4 TRAINING AND CONDUCTING DRILLS

When conducting drills as set out in your Emergency Management Plan, consider utilising an intruder scenario. Training improves confidence and preparedness in managing a possible event or threat.

In practicing your threat scenario, discuss with your incident management team the level of detail, if any, you think appropriate to disclose to the children or students. Children and students do not need to be aware of the scenario practiced, rather it is adequate to ensure that response actions such as on-site and off-site evacuation, lockdown and shelter-in-place are well practiced and familiar to everyone attending the service or school.

Feedback from staff and, where appropriate, older students can assit to refine your Emergency Management Plan for intruder threat.

4.5 EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANNING

As part of your Emergency Management Plan consider communication mechanisms to facilitate:

* silent group communication among staff members in the event of an incident such as messaging or communication apps (What’s app, Messenger, Snap chat),
* the announcement of an emergency incident or a response procedure to the school body,
* the ability for the person in charge or leadership team member to communicate with first responders
* in the event where the administration area is under duress, alternate points for external communication and;
* communication with parents/guardians.

# response procedures

Incidents involving an intruder threatening harm are unpredictable, develop rapidly and may result in significant injury or loss of life. Due to the changeable nature of how these incidents may unfold, it is not possible to establish a single set of response procedures.

The procedures outlined below are indicative only and are provided as a guide to assist staff at early childhood services and schools to develop response strategies to address the risks associated with potential intruder events on site or near their facility. The person in charge will need to exercise their judgment to determine the most appropriate course of action where an emergency unfolds.

5.1 RESPOND IMMEDIATLEY

When an incident occurs the person in charge (Principal, Facility Co-ordinator or Director) or delegate must activate the Emergency Management Plan and instigate **EVACUATION**, or **LOCKDOWN and SHELTER-IN-PLACE.**

Your response may involve combination of these. For example, lockdown and shelter in place may occur for children and students in buildings while an off-site evacuation may be instigated for students in another part of the site away from the threat (such as a sports or play ground). Another example may be dynamic lockdown where areas of the facility can be locked down to prevent intruders moving through the site and where areas can be progressively evacuated once more details of the incident are available.

5.2 CONTACT EMERGENCY SERVICES 000 AS SOON AS PRACTICABLE

**Where time permits, the decision regarding your response, should be made in consultation with police.**

Provide essential details of the situation, i.e. name of the intruder (if known), description, location, weapons, numbers of persons involved, injuries/casualties and actions taken by the facility.

5.3 EVACUATE TO OFF-SITE LOCATION

Where it is safe to do so, it is preferable to move staff and students away from the threat.

* Follow your Emergency Management Plan procedure for EVACUATION to off-site location.
* Do not take personal items, such as bags with you, however your mobile phone should be retained.
* Close all doors behind you. Do not lock doors.
* Keep your hands elevated with open palms visible if you encounter responding police.
* Do not carry anything in your hands that could be mistaken for a weapon.
* Staff should help those with disabilities by escorting them to the nearest exit and to the off-site evacuation area.
* Account for all children and students in your care and as much as possible, help them to remain calm.

5.4 LOCKDOWN AND SHELTER IN PLACE

Lockdown and Shelter-In-Place is the preferred option where:

* in evacuating, staff and students risk being placed in the path of the intruder,
* the intruder is moving rapidly through the premises and his/her location is not precisely known,
* it is unclear whether the intruder is acting alone and evacuation may place staff and children or students in the path of accomplices.

Implement Lockdown and Shelter-in-Place as outlined in your school/facility Emergency Management Plan.

* If gunfire is heard inside or near the facility, implement LOCKDOWN AND SHELTER-IN-PLACE immediately. Do not wait for an announcement.
* Direct children and students to seek shelter in a room with external windows or doors so that when the situation is reassessed and evacuation is possible, there is access to exits.
* Ensure the shelter in place location has doors which can be locked or barricaded securely.
* Pull down blinds, switch off lights and electronics (whiteboard, fans, heaters). If there are windows in the door, cover these if possible.
* Remain silent and encourage children/students to remain silent.
* Advise staff and children/students to hide where they will avoid detection from outside the room. If it is safe to do so, allocate staff to be posted at locked doors to allow identified students, staff and visitors to enter the buildings if locked out.
* Turn mobile phones to silent. Silently (by app message or mobile text) communicate your location to other staff and first responders. Continue to assess the possibility of evacuating staff and students in your care to an off-site location.

**ACTIONS**

**When an intruder(s) approaches the facility**

* Assess the situation:
* Is the intruder inside the facility or on the property?
* Has the intruder been identified?
* Do they have a weapon?
* Is the intruder acting alone?

**When an intruder (s) has entered the facility**

* DO NOT approach the intruder(s).
* DO NOT argue with, threaten or stare at the intruder(s).
* Assume the intruder(s) is armed, even if a weapon cannot be seen.
* If the intruder(s) is carrying a firearm, it should be regarded as being loaded.
* DO NOT attempt to disarm or otherwise apprehend the intruder(s).
* Answer any question when asked by the intruder(s).
* Avoid any sudden movement that could panic the intruder(s).
* If children, students or other staff are present, try to shift the intruder(s) attention away from them.

**When an intruder(s) has left the facility**

* Identify a centralised location (onsite or offsite) for police and/or ambulance to meet. If able to assist police in entering the facility; provide police with critical information.
* Secure all exterior doors to prevent re-entry.
* If a firearm is known to exist, do not touch it.
* Supervise the location of any firearms, and allow only the police to take possession of the weapon.
* Keep area secure. Do not allow anyone to pick up items that may belong to the intruder(s).
* Ensure that children and students are kept away from the area.

# considerations for recovery

6.1 LONGER TERM INTERVENTIONS

When it is safe to do so:

* Ascertain if all children, students, staff and visitors are accounted for.
* Attend to the post-incident needs of children, students and staff.
* Providing it is safe to do so, ensure that any injured receive medical attention from nominated first aid officer(s).
* Designate staff member(s) to accompany any victim(s) requiring ambulance transport to hospital.
* Note any items and surfaces touched by the intruder.
* Implement a re-unification process for children and students with parents/guardians to ensure all are accounted for as instructed by police.
* Ensure a sign-out process is in place for children and students when collected by parents/guardians.
* Minimise impact on child, student and staff health and well-being by engaging appropriate support from trained professionals. Contact your Department of Education and Training Regional office regarding co-ordination of recovery support.
* Organise for a staff member or Department employee to act as a liaison for family members of any injured children, students or staff.
* Prepare messaging and a letter to go to families. Government schools will consult with the Media Unit.

6.2 LONGER TERM INTERVENTIONS

In the following days and in the longer-term:

* Develop a psychosocial recovery plan for children, students, staff and families with trained clinicians to address the long term effects of the incident.
* Provide information updates, if appropriate, to staff, children, students and their families during the following days.
* Ensure that professional support is made available for staff.
* Report to police any further threats or concerns about safety.
* Under guidance, work towards a return to normality as quickly as possible keeping in mind the needs of all involved.
* If fatalities have occurred, memorial activities should be considered carefully and should only be undertaken after consultation with the families of the victims.

NOTIFY:

* Government schools must advise the Security Services Unit and seek advice from the relevant Senior Education Improvement Leader once the incident is over.
* Early childhood services must contact the approved provider/person with management or control to organise professional support for children and staff.
* Early childhood services must notify their relevant Department of Education and Training region office within 24 hours of a serious incident.
* Early childhood services and schools must contact parents of children or students at their service or school as soon as possible.
* Government schools are required to prepare letters to families in conjunction with the Region and the Media Unit 9637 2871. All media queries should be referred to the Department of Education and Training Media Unit.