

Supporting staff during times of school crisis

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We take care of our own
Bruce Springsteen - from the album, Wrecking Ball.

Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

This New Zealand research looked at the support staff are receiving/or have received from their school during a crisis and what staff felt that they need or would like.

Information about this topic was gathered via a survey to schools, discussions with School Leaders as well as others working with and connected to New Zealand education. Background information was also gathered from different media sources and personal reading on the topic.

The responses show that there is a need for many schools to improve the way they support their staff during a time of school crisis. The approach by School Leaders/Principals to staff support is inconsistent and better care of their staff is essential.

Conclusions and recommendations to assist School Leaders have then been made. These are simple and effective ways that can support staff during and after a time of school crisis.

The recommendations are:

- There is a need for School Leaders to better understand the process of loss and grief
- Schools review their Traumatic Incident Policy and ensure there is specific provision made for comprehensive staff support during and after a school crisis
- Schools differentiate between a 'traumatic incident' and a 'school crisis' in their Traumatic Incident Policy
- Schools need to be more sensitive towards the concept of hauora and ensure Druie's whare tapawha model forms part of supporting staff during a crisis
- When a crisis occurs or is about to happen, the school needs to have Relief staff available to take classes.
- Clear, honest communication needs to be given from School Leaders about the crisis
- Empathy and understanding need to be shown by School Leaders
- Availability of professional, external Counsellors to support staff
- A private area is made available for staff to go to during a crisis
- School Leaders explain the role of the media during a crisis
- A debrief is held after a crisis that involves all staff
- Professional Development is given for staff about the crisis.

Why do we need to discuss how to support staff during times of school crisis?



Part of being a teacher is about trying to support students and in times of school crisis, staff want to help their students. They, like the students, are used to routine and order and when a crisis happens, this is lost. Students are upset, crying, angry, in a daze, suddenly un-cooperative or impulsive and this challenges what teachers are used to.

Yesterday, they were working away in class and today everything has changed.

The natural response for most teachers is to look after the students. The lessons are placed on hold and they become supporters for the students in crisis. The worst behaved student is now sitting quietly and alone in the corner of the room. The big, staunch boy is now crying with his friends. This in itself is quite a difficult thing for teachers to come to terms with. Luckily, the school counsellor/s take the lead in student support and they also have excellent support from the Ministry of Education Traumatic Incident Team or the TI Team.

However, while there is support for students, there is a lack of support for staff during and after a crisis. Who is supporting the supporters and what specifically do teachers want during a school crisis? Has anyone ever asked teachers what it is they specifically want?

There is a large amount of information/research on supporting students (both in New Zealand and overseas) but there is very limited information on the best way to support staff. If staff are not supported, how can they be expected to fully support students?

Even the mention of teacher support in different Traumatic Incident Policy's is vague:

- ..staff must be given the opportunity to express their grief.
- ..staff and students need a comforting and reassuring environment.
- ..time for staff reflection and response
- ...the Principal will keep staff informed.

The lack of specific procedures or processes for staff during a crisis is disappointing. There is the assumption that staff will 'carry on as normal'. In colloquial terms, I would describe it as 'a chin-up, stiff upper lip...No.8 fencing wire fix and let's get back to teaching as usual'.

It was remarked to me that some people think “...teachers don't grieve and that they have to carry on delivering the lesson.”

Other comments were:

“I felt like employee 37 on that day rather than a person who had links to the deceased.”

“I would liked to have been treated like an actual human being who has feelings and emotions.”

What is a ‘school crisis’?

From my reading of a number of schools Traumatic Incident Policy, they have used the Ministry of Education (2010) definition of ‘traumatic’ as the basis for their own definition.

The Ministry define a ‘traumatic incident’ as one that:

- causes sudden and/or significant disruption to the operation, or effective operation...of a school and their community
- has the potential to affect a large number of children, young people and staff
- creates significant dangers or risks to the physical and emotional well-being of...young people and people within the community
- attracts media attention or public profile for...the school as a result of the incident.

The Ministry of Education also gives examples of what they see as traumatic incidents:

- The sudden death or serious injury of a... young person, staff member or family or whanau member
- Witnessing serious death injury or death of a... young person, staff member or family or whanau member
- Threats to the safety...of young people
- A lost or missing...young person or staff member
- Floods, fires, earthquakes and other community crisis or natural disasters.

In my research, I have based my definition of a ‘school crisis’ on the above as it is straightforward, comprehensive and easy to understand.

However, my definition of a ‘school crisis’ has another element to it:

A 'crisis' has two parts to it. First, it is a negative, sudden and significant event that impacts on the usual day-to-day running of the school. Second, it involves negative media attention and publicity.

I have added that a 'school crisis' must involve negative media attention and publicity. The school is viewed by the community and the New Zealand public in a negative way. It faces criticism for their action and the public profile of the school is damaged. For me this is the main point of difference between a 'traumatic incident' and my definition of a 'school crisis'.

There could be 'traumatic incident' for the school where the outcome is, thankfully, positive – a student is lost in the bush (traumatic) but is found several hours later (positive). It attracts media attention and the school shows that due to its correct paperwork for the trip, briefings with the students and other planning, the school was well prepared. The impact and effect on the school may be limited and the community and the public may view this incident in a 'positive' way or as a 'good news story'. For example, a parental response could be "thank goodness they found the student so quickly...at least they didn't spend the night out in the cold."

Legal responsibilities to supporting staff in times of crisis

One of the principles of the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) 5.1. is that schools have a responsibility to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for their staff and students. A school crisis may fit into both the physical and emotional harm category and so schools have a responsibility to support their staff.

Secondly, schools must also comply with the Health and Safety Employment Act (1992). The effect of a school crisis in this Act, is contained under:

Object of Act

The object of this Act is to promote the prevention of harm to all persons at work and other persons in, or in the vicinity of, a place of work by—

- a) promoting excellence in health and safety management, in particular through promoting the systematic management of health and safety; and
- b) defining hazards and harm in a comprehensive way so that all hazards and harm are covered, including harm caused by work-related stress and hazardous behaviour caused by certain temporary conditions.

What research methodology was used?

My qualitative research was centered on the gathering and interpretation of responses given in answer to questions about the support that staff received during a time of school crisis.

This was not only to be focused on State secondary schools. I also solicited and received survey responses from primary teachers, representatives of the Ministry of Education, Special Education and Private secondary schools.

In addition, I spoke with Principals, school counselors and others connected with New Zealand education. They offered comments and advice on my research and gave their opinions on my topic.

As part of my research, I investigated recommendations and lessons from businesses and organisations that have received negative media attention during a crisis. My goal was to see if any of their subsequent recommendations could be used in a school crisis.

My online survey data results were anonymous and collected using Google Forms :

<http://bit.ly/1yYBaJ>

I received 114 survey returns. Ninety-three were from females and twenty-one from males.

One hundred and nine were from secondary teachers with twenty-one indicating they were either SLT/SMT or School Leaders. The rest were either teachers; Deans/Tutors; HOD's; TIC's; Office staff or Nurse.

There was also a diversity of ethnic backgrounds identified by the respondents – eleven ethnicities in total. The main ones being NZ European; Maori; Pasifika; Indian; Fijian Indian and Chinese.

In addition to this survey, I monitored media publications for articles mentioning schools by name and showing that school in a negative situation.



I read the news today, oh boy
(Lennon/McCartney)

Findings

The following are the printed articles I saw and collected from November 2013 to November 2014.

These 59 articles, from New Zealand print or television print media, name the school in the crisis. I have only included the headline of the article and have removed the name of the school or person with ***** where it was given.

DATE	TITLE	SOURCE
11 November 2013	<i>Roastbusters school did nothing – victim's mother</i>	TV3
12 November 2013	<i>Roastbusters: High School investigates alleged website attack</i>	NZ Herald
12 November 2013	<i>Pupils' deaths spark crisis talks</i>	TVNZ
20 November 2013	<i>The wrong face</i>	NZ Herald
2 December 2013	<i>Boozed pupils accused of 'desecrating' holiday home</i>	NZ Herald
24 January 2014	<i>Teen sentenced over sex video says rugby injuries affected judgement</i>	TVNZ
31 January 2014	<i>School donation badges were a 'mistake' – principal</i>	TVNZ
3 February 2014	<i>Fees-row pupils kept out of class</i>	NZ Herald
10 February, 2014	<i>Teacher accused of assaulting student in class</i>	TVNZ
11 February 2014	<i>***** finds solution to religious stand-off</i>	NZ Herald
20 February 2014	<i>Teen with Asperger's expelled due to lack of resources, court told</i>	NZ Herald

11 March, 2014	<i>Teacher shocks pupils with homemade sex tape</i>	NZ Herald
13 March, 2014	<i>Principal took \$30k from decile one school</i>	NZ Herald
13 March 2014	<i>Teacher hangs head in shame at sexual abuse sentencing</i>	TVNZ
8 May 2014	<i>School shut down over asbestos risk</i>	NZ Herald
9 May 2014	<i>Teacher sentenced to 9 ½ years</i>	Stuff NZ
12 May 2014	<i>Principal faces assault charge before new job in England</i>	NZ Herald
20 May 2014	<i>Ministry denies quick-fix</i>	Franklin News
26 May 2014	<i>School in red spends up large on Fonterra shares</i>	NZ Herald
29 May 2014	<i>Top school rugby players caught stealing in Japan mall</i>	NZ Herald
3 June 2014	<i>Rival school rugby fans erupt in stands</i>	NZ Herald
19 June 2014	<i>School bars gang dad from camp</i>	NZ Herald
24 June 2014	<i>Haircut battle: Teen prepares for return to school</i>	TVNZ
25 June 2014	<i>School stabbing sends 'shockwave' through community</i>	TVNZ
26 June 2014	<i>Bullying before scissor fight alleged</i>	NZ Herald
30 June 2014	<i>Stabbed boy's gay sister: School ignored me</i>	NZ Herald
30 June 2014	<i>Forgiveness for school stabbing</i>	NZ Herald
30 June 2014	<i>Caught with his hair down</i>	Hawke's Bay Today News
30 June 2014	<i>***** gets to go to school ball after all</i>	NZ Herald
13 July 2014	<i>Boy wakes from coma</i>	NZ Herald
15 July 2014	<i>***** school counsellor on sex charge</i>	NZ Herald
25 July 2014	<i>***** cleared of racist teachings</i>	Stuff NZ
26 July 2014	<i>Teacher's depravity lost in system</i>	NZ Herald
11 August 2014	<i>Guard evicts fired coach's supporters</i>	NZ Herald
19 August 2014	<i>Accused naming a win for school</i>	Stuff NZ
19 August 2014	<i>***** teacher charged</i>	NZ Herald
31 August 2014	<i>Abortion and suicide essays banned</i>	Stuff NZ
5 September 2014	<i>Private school investigates student striptease</i>	TV3
13 September 2014	<i>School's hair rule may be challenged</i>	NZ Herald
15 September 2014	<i>High school student found comatose drunk</i>	Stuff NZ
16 September 2014	<i>Gift creates after-ball hangover</i>	Stuff NZ
17 September 2014	<i>Priest pleads guilty to indecent assault charge</i>	Stuff NZ
7 October 2014	<i>Auckland principal and husband stole from school</i>	Stuff NZ
23 October 2014	<i>Former teacher jailed for molesting students</i>	Hawkes Bay News
28 October 2014	<i>Police probe school bullying</i>	Stuff NZ
28 October 2014	<i>Elite school hit by bullying claim</i>	NZ Herald
30 October 2014	<i>Family devastated by teen's death</i>	NZ Herald
2 November 2014	<i>School takes tough line on 'pillowcase' bullies</i>	Stuff NZ
2 November 2014	<i>Teen arrested over *****</i>	Stuff NZ
4 November 2014	<i>Severe injuries put gym safety under spotlight</i>	NZ Herald
15 November 2014	<i>School's teacher loss stirs unease</i>	NZ Herald
17 November 2014	<i>***** students hurt in bus crash near Thames</i>	NZ Herald
19 November 2014	<i>Female teacher quits over sex inquiry</i>	NZ Herald
21 November 2014	<i>Principal subject of council inquiry</i>	NZ Herald
24 November 2014	<i>Investigation into ***** dispute</i>	The Daily Post
25 November 2014	<i>*****Principal struck off for inappropriate student relationship</i>	NZ Herald
27 November 2014	<i>Teachers who force-fed children to keep teaching</i>	NZ Herald
27 November 2014	<i>Schools in lockdown as police hunt man after triple stabbing</i>	NZ Herald
29 November 2014	<i>'Metal was flying everywhere' – Horror crash victims were on school trip</i>	NZ Herald

A crisis in the business world

Businesses or organisations are frequently the subject of unwanted media attention during a crisis. Schools are able to build on the lessons these organisations have learnt.

For example, Malaysia Airlines Flights 370 and 17. In a recent interview (Stuff, 20/7/2014) a union official for the Flight Attendants said morale among airline personnel is low. He talks about workers being sad and depressed. They had not 'overcome the battle' of losing one aircraft and then they lost another. There is huge loss of human life, family suffering and disbelief by friends and relatives. There is also the financial loss to the airline as people are hesitant to fly with them and so there is the crisis of economic viability.

Secondly, Fonterra and the botulism scare in 2013. This crisis is clear with the headline: *Fonterra failed to see 'explosive reputational risk'* (NZ Herald, 30 October 2013).

After reading this, I wondered if Fonterra could be 'replaced' by any school in crisis and if some of the recommendations of their Independent inquiry could apply to a school and be reflected in my survey results:

- Belated recognition of the explosive reputational risk of the crisis.
- Delayed escalation of the crisis to reach senior management.
- A lack of senior oversight of crucial decisions and problems.
- Crisis management planning, including external communication aspects was not 'well executed.'

Ciotti (2013) outlines some things to do when a business faces a crisis. They are:

- Admit your mistakes and don't keep blaming external situations. Say, 'I'm sorry' and own the mistake.
- Don't have a 'meltdown' and take it out on fellow employees.
- Give frequent, transparent updates.
- Don't go dark during a crisis and say nothing – to both the media and employees and customers.
- Don't keep your cards too close and so people get information in other ways – social media, disgruntled employees.
- React quickly to a potential crisis.

In late September 2014, Apple launched the new iPhone 6 and a new operating system, iOS8. Within hours of this, Apple users were having issues with the update and the new flagship phone was not working as planned.

Apple was in crisis but media commentators have since said they did three things right. First, they admitted publicly they had made a mistake with the system. Secondly, they gave assurances that they would fix the problems as soon as they could. Thirdly, they gave regular updates through social media and press releases on the progress that they were making.

Complications within a school crisis



The Principal/School Leaders play a significant role in the crisis.

This creates considerable tension for staff members. On the one hand, they are looking for leadership and direction and on the other they can see they 'failed them' in the first place. Staff may then 'take sides' as to whom they think is right or wrong causing even further staff division.

In most cases, it is the Principal who will speak with the media and staff may see and hear glaring inconsistencies in what is being said to the media and what they know.

The Principal/BOT/School Leaders caused the crisis or lied about the crisis.

This is a very difficult situation for staff. In situations where criminal charges or activity has occurred, then direction must come from the Ministry of Education.



The Principal 'attacks' the media or other organisation

This may happen out of frustration or bad advice or poor decision making by the Principal. Parents and the community feel and think they are in the wrong. Some recent media comments from Principals have included:

It was *..."almost laughable" someone would make an issue of this...frankly, this is a nonsense line of inquiry."*

"My version is it's not a story anymore...the numbers are exaggerated to make up a story". It's not a difficult issue. It's not an issue at all"

"...it's not as bad as it sounds." – Principal response to ERO report that finds that 33% of schools were unlikely to recognise situations when students could be at risk from staff and respond accordingly.

The Principal tries to 'play down' the crisis

Here again, this can create conflict with staff, students, parents and the community. The situation becomes one of them saying, *"I know what I saw...I know what the video on my mobile shows"*. A recent media comment from a Principal was: *"I wouldn't call it a brawl – just heated banter, really."*

Smartphones

These are now cheap (under \$100) and most students now carry them. An incident, leading to a crisis can be videoed, with sound, on the phone. This can then be distributed very quickly to other students, the community and the media. Video with sound is perfect for viewing, distribution and going viral within minutes. One recent example of this was, *Private school investigates student striptease* (TV3, 5 September, 2014).



Social media

This is linked to the use of smartphones. An incident involving a school can be uploaded in seconds and quickly become viral. It goes from being a 'school crisis' to a national and perhaps even, an international event. Examples of this are Facebook pages that are solely on a school crisis. A comment from my survey states:

"Leadership says there is an issue and we are told to squash student gossip but we have to wait for students to fill in the details... it would be better to tell students that what they have heard is not correct or to deal with it better rather than just saying 'duh, I don't really know anything about that...what have you heard?'"

You Tube

Here again, this is linked to both of the above, with the added complication of a degree permanence. For example, prospective students and employees know to Search a school using the words 'fight' or 'vs'. A crisis from many years ago will appear, if the school has not had the goodwill of the uploader to remove it.

"After the YouTube incident, the school became aware how slowly they had responded, it took a full day for most of the teachers to know that something had happened, I was getting emails from parents about it and could not get a hold of the principal...Thankfully both incidents were bogus, but lack of information seems to be the big issue and causes both staff and student concern."

Reputation

This is a significant complication to any school crisis – reputation. In the era of school published league tables and 'competing schools', a school crisis can affect enrolments, teacher applications and teacher retention. The community loses confidence in the school and there is 'flight' to other schools. This can lead to a falling roll and the financial and personal consequences that this brings.

Cassio: Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, lago, my reputation! (*Othello* – II:III:24)

Loss of control

Schools maintain order with their students through goodwill, control, routine, expectations, rules and discipline. A crisis suddenly challenges this in a number of ways. For example, the role of the media who want their story – here is a comment from my survey:

"...the press were camped outside the school all day for 3 days, anyone in or out including students ran the gauntlet. Press were climbing fences to get into the school grounds and talking to anyone who would speak - it was tough."

The media may speak to students out of school grounds and while students may be asked not to speak with them, schools cannot control this. Similarly, the school cannot stop filming from the road of their school sign or main gate. For many schools, their crest is almost iconic and something they use for positive promotion – it is now associated with something negative.

Secondly, the response of a Principal during a crisis is often reactive as the crisis is evolving. More information may be given to the media without the schools knowledge. More video footage may be uploaded that the school is unaware of and Facebook pages can appear in minutes. The Principal may decide to 'shutdown' Facebook at school to reduce a crisis. The issue here is that nearly all students carry a mobile phone and the cost of data means that they can access it through 3G networks.

The length of time of a crisis

Some may be short lived and some can, literally, be continuing after years. Often a long-term school crisis is the result of criminal/Court action and so new staff, students and the community become part of the crisis and yet may not have full knowledge of it. Old wounds may be re opened having to explain the original crisis.

The staff themselves

The resilience of staff to deal with a crisis has to be considered by the school. For example, the age of staff and their teaching and life experience; the severity of the crisis and the frequency of the crisis; the role of their family and their background; location of the crisis – local/national/international.

Negative legacy

As one response said, they felt “embarrassed” to be a staff member at their school in crisis as people kept asking about it. Similarly, I know of teachers who will not identify themselves as a teacher at a school in a long-term crisis as they are simply tired of all the media and public attention.

Smaller, rural schools are also more in the spotlight because of their place in the community and small number of local people they cater for.

What findings can be taken from the survey sent to NZ schools?

Has your school been through a crisis that has involved media attention? If yes, please describe briefly.

I asked this question to gauge the severity of the crisis staff has gone through. The responses clearly show that these schools have suffered significant and long-term issues and this will have had a major impact on staff.

Note: This is not in any particular order nor does it reflect the actual number of incidents.

- Sexual assault
- Bullying
- Sudden death of student – e.g. Motor vehicle accident; EOTC
- Student suicide
- Staff suicide
- Staff member convicted of criminal offences
- Staff member facing criminal charges
- Earthquakes/flooding

- Violence – fights between students
- Arson
- School bus accident/death
- Drowning
- Murder of student
- Threat of firearms use
- Assault on a staff member

What are your top three areas/kinds of support that school leaders (e.g. Principal, Senior Leaders, SMT/SLT, BoT...) should give/offer staff during times of school crisis?

The response that was given most often I have categorised as ‘time.’ Staff felt that when a crisis happened they often needed time away from school and the classroom to either do practical things – see EQC; banks; Insurance companies or to have time to reflect, consider and grieve. They wanted to be able to be given Leave quickly and as one respondent wrote “...waive the legal nitty gritty.”

There was also the feeling of not having to feel guilty about having to ask for Leave or time away from class:

*“***** told us he did not care about our personal problems or family issues...he wanted positive positive positive for the kids at school.”*

Some just wanted the opportunity to have a ‘mental health day’ and to spend time with their friends and family for support.

The word ‘leadership’ was another form of support staff should be given. Staff look to their Principal for this with comments like the SLT needing to “*show us the path to go.*”

They wanted ‘communication’ from their Senior Leaders. This communication had to be clear, effective, timely and ‘*the truth*’. It was clear from some responses that this was definitely not what they had experienced during their crisis and there was also a lack of transparency.

“As a staff we were given ‘technical’ truths. We were told that none of the students involved were from our school. We found out later that they had been at our school and then left/signed out. Technically the Principal was correct but we felt like we had been tricked.”

Linked to this idea of leadership is that the respondents wanted “*Kindness and understanding...*” from their school leaders. The words they used were ‘empathy’; ‘compassion’; ‘moral support’; ‘approachability’ and an ‘ability to listen’; an ability to ‘identify staff who were struggling’.

However, respondents also made these comments:

*“We were spoken to harshly by *****. Repeatedly and basically told to harden up and focus on the kids at school.”*

“...any issues the staff may be suffering were not important and all our attention must go towards the students and the school.”

"...I felt abandoned."

"The SLT expected staff to carry on as normal without any empathy or understanding for what the staff and their families were going through."

"The Principal stood up and said they had bought a house that was structurally sound and in an area unaffected by the earthquakes. That was so insensitive to staff whose houses were badly damaged or destroyed."

Schools, during and after a crisis should also offer free, outside agency, professional counselling. Several respondents mentioned that this should be available and advertised even if the offer was not taken up by staff.

As a staff, what support did your school leaders give you during this crisis? Please describe briefly.

The support the respondents were given the most was information about the event or updates on the crisis. Some were given advice when answering questions from students and there was also support from the school counsellors and some from outside counsellors – this external counselling support was available to some respondents in the future.

Outside agencies were also identified as 'supportive'. For example, specific mention was made of the Traumatic Incident Team; Red Cross; PPTA.

There were many comments about the School Leaders 'support' focusing on 'don't speak to the media'. This appears to be common practice in most Traumatic Incident Policy's with either the Principal, BoT Representative or other nominated person, having this role.

There were also 'support' issues with even speaking with the students about the crisis. As one respondent commented:

"It all felt very isolating. Don't talk to the press. Don't talk to the students. Don't talk."

Similarly:

"The Principal constantly warned of adverse media attention."

Another wrote that their major support was, "Keep calm and don't talk about it." And another said that they "...found more information via the media" (especially social media).

On a more positive note, most schools supported the students by having a place for them to meet and use as a base for the crisis. Staff and students could "attend the funeral" and two different respondents said their school gave them relief time for this.

There was one school that showed real empathy and understanding with the comment:

"I felt the support of the staff and students was wonderful. [The] marae was set up on the Sunday for anyone in our community to share memories..."

On the other hand there were many comments about the lack of school support:

- *"...no offer of counselling support"*
- *"just swept under the rug attitude."*
- *"We received absolutely nothing. Nothing from school managers nothing from the MOE".*
- *"...nothing, I was told to go and teach like normal."*
- *"Very little, they paid lip service to support but the reality was different."*
- *"None. [death of a colleague]. We were informed at morning tea and then the bell went for us to teach period 3."*
- *"Limited. Poor leadership during the crisis and erratic and cloudy decisions."*

What support would you have liked but it was not offered/given? Please describe.

This question gave the opportunity for respondents to make suggestions based on their experience/s of a school crisis. This is central to my recommendations and again, I would like to thank the respondents for their thought and care with their writing.

I have put these suggestions into categories and groups.

More information.

A number of responses said they were *"not given enough information"* about the crisis and this was an issue for them. *"People were acting in an uncoordinated way and this created conflict."*

Professional development

Several wanted outside speakers to discuss with them issues like student suicide and grief with the death of students they taught. They also wanted staff education about the crisis and any things that could be done or used to prevent a similar crisis happening again.

Time away from school

This was described as sick leave; relief time; just time for my family or as one person wrote, *"I would have liked half an hour to weep..."*

Staff feedback

There was also a feeling that there should be an opportunity for staff to feedback to their school leaders on how they handled the crisis. The word 'debrief' with all stakeholders in the crisis and this included agencies like the Police and their role in managing the crisis. One comment was that there a need to *"...pull in community support more."*

Outside counselling at the school's expense

The opportunity to access this was considered very important along with supporting the regular school counsellors. Comments were also made that there was a need for a private school space for staff to grieve, talk and simply discuss what had happened.

School administration

There were comments about having administrative support during a crisis. The need for a person to be responsible for the cards, emails, messages, flowers and visitors to the school. A sense of welcoming a greeting both culturally appropriate and sympathetic to the crisis that has happened. It could also be something as simple as cancelling after school meetings or *"reducing the paperwork"* so that staff has some extra time.

Empathy and understanding

There were well over a dozen responses that wrote about this and a lack of genuine understanding from their School Leaders and Board of Trustees. The latter should play a public, visible and empathetic role in any school crisis. However, this is sometimes not the case:

“There was no support from any member of the BOT even coming to a staff meeting. The following week they [BOT] provided morning tea. Their idea of support after a student suicide was a sandwich and a sausage roll.”

The concept of hauora (Appendix One) was mentioned in both the survey responses and in my discussions with people. In essence, we teach our students that these are important areas that need to be cared for and respected. Unfortunately this does not appear to be the case for many School Leaders and their staff.

Conclusions

*There ain't no help, the cavalry stayed home
There ain't no one hearing the bugle blowin'...*

Bruce Springsteen

Schools can learn from a crisis in the business world. In their crisis, Apple did some things that people, like Ciotti (2013), had suggested:

- Admit your mistakes and don't keep blaming external situations. Say, 'I'm sorry' and own the mistake.
- Give frequent, transparent updates.
- Don't 'go dark' during a crisis and say nothing – to both the media and employees and customers.
- React quickly to a potential crisis.

Many of the responses to my survey stated that their school needed to be more open, honest and transparent when dealing with them as well as with the students, the community and the media.

While some schools gave support to staff during a crisis – and they acknowledged how important this was, the responses confirm that there is a long way to go for this to be a widespread and usual procedure. The comments made about the reactions to a crisis by some school leaders, shows there is a lack of empathy with their staff and almost an antagonism towards them. While School Leaders have to run a school, in times of crisis they need to be sensitive, responsive and not dismissive, towards to what is happening with their staff.

The need for staff to receive 'time' – to grieve, to be with family, to make practical arrangements, to think, to talk is very important. The feeling that 'the show must go on' immediately after hearing of a crisis is an issue for staff. This 'time' will depend on the individual, their emotional proximity to the crisis and the length of time the crisis occurs. It cannot be assumed that 'all is well' with staff once the regular routines and patterns of the school begin again.

Staff will certainly get some support from their colleagues during a crisis, but the

responses show the need for outside, professional counselling to be made available. Some may not access it but the opportunity to get this support shows that the school is being supportive and taking the health of their staff seriously.

How should we support staff during times of school crisis?

The following are recommendations from my research.

- *There is a need for School Leaders to better understand the process of loss and grief*

In 1969, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross first discussed the stages of mourning and grief with the death of a loved one. Since then, many researchers and books have been written on dealing with loss and grief and the stages that people can go through. They write about the different stages and depending on the writer, there can be between four and eight stages. For example, Axelrod (2014) gives them as Denial and Isolation; Anger; Bargaining; Depression and Acceptance.

Grief and loss can also be felt in a school and it may not involve the death of a person. For example, it could be the realisation that a school has 'lost their reputation' due to the actions of a long serving member of that school. It could be guilt, anger or frustration over the actions or inactions of another staff member to a serious student situation. It could be the loss of years of teaching resources and viewing the damage to a classroom and student work.

School leaders need to be more aware that people go through these grieving and loss stages differently, sometimes months later and that it is an emotionally and physically draining time. Axelrod (2014) states that:

Coping with loss is ultimately a deeply personal and singular experience... [but]others can be there for you and help you through this process.

Following on from this comment are some suggestions as to the role people can have when dealing with others in a crisis. In 2013, Susan Silk, a clinical psychologist, wrote an article for the Los Angeles Times about what she calls the Ring Theory (Appendix Two) for helping people in crisis - "It works in all kinds of crises -- medical, legal, even existential."

Silk's Ring Theory is a simple, easy way for School Leaders to reflect, show empathy, support and kindness to staff that are in crisis.

- *Schools review their Traumatic Incident Policy and ensure there is specific provision made for comprehensive staff support during and after a school crisis*

My research has shown that there are significant gaps in what schools are doing to support staff in times of crisis.

- *Schools differentiate between a 'traumatic incident' and a 'school crisis' in their Traumatic Incident Policy*

A 'school crisis' must involve negative media attention and publicity - a 'traumatic

incident' may not. The school, in a school crisis, is viewed by the community and the New Zealand public in a negative way. It faces criticism for their action and the public profile of the school is damaged.

- *Schools need to be more sensitive towards the concept of hauora and ensure Druie's whare tapawha model forms part of supporting staff during a crisis*

Hauora comprises taha tinana, taha hinengaro, taha whanau, and taha wairua. The concept of well-being encompasses the physical, mental and emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of health.

- *When a crisis occurs or is about to happen, the school needs to have Relief staff available to take classes*

It is clear from the respondents that having 'time' was a major form of support for them. This may be for only a class period or two after the initial announcement of the crisis or it may be for much longer when staff is dealing with a long-term school crisis.

This will create an extra expense for the school but it is outweighed by the support staff will get. Giving 'time' to staff in the short term may also lead to staff not needing longer term stress/sick leave – which can mean more expense for the school.

- *Clear, honest communication needs to be given from School Leaders about the crisis*

The responses confirm that this was not always happening and this led to confusion and a loss of trust in the school. Staff must be kept informed about what is happening as soon as possible.

School Leaders should make more use of social media like Facebook and Twitter. Many schools now have a school App and this is accessible to staff, students, the community and the media. Information about the crisis can be conveyed immediately and it is coming from an 'official' source.

- *Empathy and understanding need to be shown by School Leaders*

Goleman (1995) wrote about the importance of empathy and how it encourages co-operation through connectedness. It is about acknowledging and having both heard and understood what the other person has said.

It is clear from responses that some School Leaders are lacking in this skill. Comments that were said to staff during a crisis show a lack of compassion and, as one person wrote, 'kindness'.

These Leaders' comments may have been said at a time of great stress for them but they have had an effect on the morale and support of their staff.

- *Availability of professional, external Counsellors to support staff*

Some responses showed that this was available to staff, but it is something that should be made available for all staff during a crisis. The staff member should be able to choose the person they would like to speak with and the school then pays that Counsellor.

It should not be a person the school has chosen or someone who will give the school 'a deal' to see staff.

- *A private area is made available for staff to go to*

This is a place where staff can go to in the school that is private, quiet and away from students. Things like coffee, tea and water should also be available. The area, depending on the nature and size of the crisis, could be somewhere updates about the crisis are given.

This area should not be the staffroom as it is too public and there must be a karakia before it is used.

- *School Leaders explain the role of the media during a crisis*

There were many comments in the survey about how staff were warned about not speaking to the media and the consequences if they did. The school needs to have clear and accurate information about the crisis available to the media and it is best if this comes from one person.

Staff need to have explained to them the reason for this and the effect an inaccurate statement or rumour could have on the staff, school and community.

- *A debrief is held after a crisis that involves staff*

Most schools would go through this with their Pastoral Care Team but the survey confirms that all staff want to be involved. They will have had a chance to reflect on the crisis and so have suggestions to make.

- *Professional Development is given for staff about the crisis*

This follows on from the above recommendation and goes to the heart of, 'what did we learn...how could we have done things better.'

Staff want to improve their response to a crisis especially in things like what to say to students and how, if possible, to see signs of a similar, future crisis.

Glossary

BoT	Board of Trustees
NZ Herald	The New Zealand Herald
Principal	The head/leader of the school. This also includes Headmasters/Headmistresses.
Stuff	Stuff.co.nz
School Leaders	Senior Leadership Team – Principal, Deputy Principal etc . This term also includes teams known as SMT – Senior Management Team, and Executive Team.
TVNZ	Television New Zealand
3News	TV3 news

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Appendix One:

Well-being, hauora

The following has been taken from the TKI page on Health and Physical Education in the *New Zealand Curriculum*.

Hauora is a Māori philosophy of health unique to New Zealand. It comprises taha tinana, taha hinengaro, taha whanau, and taha wairua. The concept of well-being encompasses the physical, mental and emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of health. This concept is recognised by the World Health Organisation

Taha tinana - Physical well-being

The physical body, its growth, development, and ability to move, and ways of caring for it

Taha hinengaro - Mental and emotional well-being

Coherent thinking processes, acknowledging and expressing thoughts and feelings and responding constructively

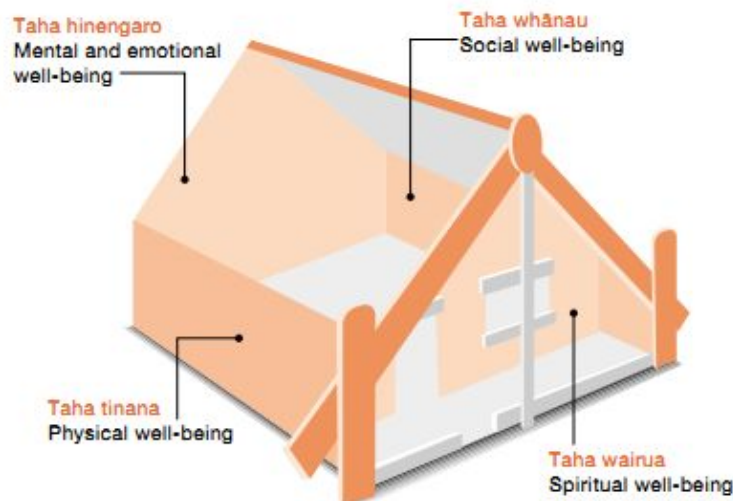
Taha whanau - Social well-being

Family relationships, friendships, and other interpersonal relationships; feelings of belonging, compassion, and caring; and social support

Taha wairua - Spiritual well-being

The values and beliefs that determine the way people live, the search for meaning and purpose in life, and personal identity and self-awareness (For some individuals and communities, spiritual well-being is linked to a particular religion; for others, it is not).

Each of these four dimensions of hauora influences and supports the others.

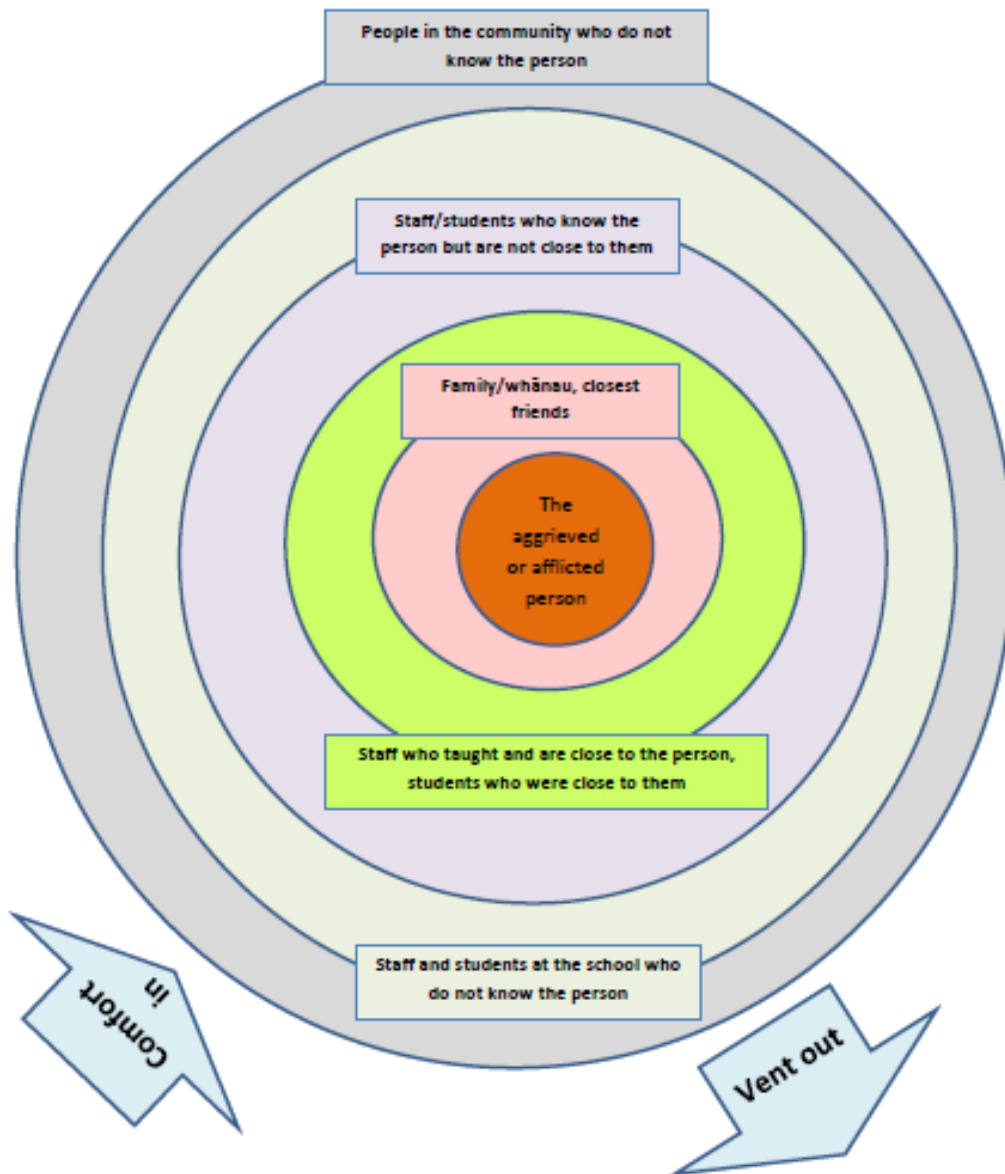


Dr Mason Durie's whare tapawha model compares hauora to the four walls of a whare, each wall representing a different dimension: taha wairua (the spiritual side); taha hinengaro (thoughts and feelings); taha tinana (the physical side); and taha whanau (family). All four dimensions are necessary for strength and symmetry. (Adapted from Mason Durie's *Whaiora: Māori Health Development*. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1994, page 70).

Appendix Two:

The Ring Theory

I have adapted and redrawn Silk's diagram on the Ring Theory, to suit a school context.



Silk explains her Ring Theory as follows:

Draw a circle. This is the center ring. In it, put the name of the person at the center of the current trauma.

Now draw a larger circle around the first one. In that ring put the name of the person next closest to the trauma.

Repeat the process as many times as you need to. In each larger ring put the next closest people. Parents and children before more distant relatives.

Here are the rules:

The person in the center ring can say anything they want to anyone, anywhere. They can ...whine and moan and curse the heavens and say, "Life is unfair" and "Why me?" That's the one payoff for being in the center ring.

Everyone else can say those things too, but only to people in larger rings.

When you are talking to a person in a ring smaller than yours, someone closer to the center of the crisis, the goal is to help. Listening is often more helpful than talking. But if you're going to open your mouth, ask yourself if what you are about to say is likely to provide comfort and support. If it isn't, don't say it.

Don't, for example, give advice. People who are suffering from trauma don't need advice. They need comfort and support. So say, "I'm sorry" or "This must really be hard for you" ... Don't say, "You should hear what happened to me" or "Here's what I would do if I were you." And don't say, "This is really bringing me down."

If you want to scream or cry or complain, if you want to tell someone how shocked you are... or whine about how it reminds you of all the terrible things that have happened to you lately, that's fine. It's a perfectly normal response.

Just do it to someone in a bigger ring.

Comfort IN, dump [Vent] OUT.

Complaining to someone in a smaller ring than yours doesn't do either of you any good. On the other hand, being supportive to her principal caregiver may be the best thing you can do for the [person at the center].

Remember, you can say whatever you want if you just wait until you're talking to someone in a larger ring than yours.