

**CHC08 Community Services
Training Package v2.1**

CHCYTH407D Respond to critical situations

Learner guide

Version 1

**Training and Education Support
Industry Skills Unit
Meadowbank**



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Contributors

Berenice Murphy
Community Services Teacher
Illawarra Institute, TAFE NSW

Michael Rayment
Community Services Teacher
Hunter Institute, TAFE NSW

Reviewer

Karin Rule
Education Programs Manager
Training and Education Support, Industry Skills Unit, Meadowbank TAFE NSW

Project Manager

Marylin Klein
R/Education Programs Manager
Training and Education Support, Industry Skills Unit, Meadowbank TAFE NSW

Enquiries

Enquiries about this and other publications can be made to:

Training and Education Support Industry Skills Unit, Meadowbank
Meadowbank TAFE
Level 3, Building J,
See Street,
MEADOWBANK NSW 2114

Tel: 02-9942 3200

Fax: 02-9942 3257

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Topic 1 Planning for critical incidents

This topic provides the underpinning skills and knowledge required to address critical incidents in the community services industry. Developing a professional response to critical incidents within the context of an agency framework allows workers to respond to incidents confidently, effectively and appropriately. In addition to defining critical incidents and emergencies we will review behavioural factors that contribute and indicate a critical incident. The importance of a critical incident plan which includes prevention, preparedness, responses, recovery and reviewing the management of critical incidents is also addressed.

Identifying critical incidents

A critical incident is any situation faced by a community services worker and/or client that causes the individual to experience unusually strong emotional reactions. These reactions have the potential to interfere with the individual's ability to function, either at the time of the incident or in the period following the incident. Generally speaking, there are three primary parties that require attention in a critical situation:

- the client
- the community services worker
- other people likely to be affected (e.g. friends, family, etc.).

What one person considers a crisis, another person may see as a normal set of events. It is important to have a clear understanding of what is meant by *crisis*, and a common definition of crisis is outlined below.

"A crisis occurs when an individual's ability to cope with a stressful life event overwhelms them. This challenge or threat, may for a time, seem insurmountable and may challenge a person's traditional ways of coping, which causes or has the potential to cause serious adverse outcomes".

Most crises that we experience are part of the normal range of life experiences that most of us can expect to happen from time to time. Examples might be a relationship breakdown, work crisis, car accident or illness. There are, however, many crisis situations outside of our everyday experience of coping resources that may require expert help to achieve recovery.

In comparison, a critical incident involves a risk or perception of potential harm. Working in a community service field, such as youth work, means that critical incidents can occur quite regularly. It is important for you to be familiar with ways of taking action in times of a critical situation, and developing strategies for minimising the chances of someone being injured.

Examples of critical incidents

Some examples of critical incidents in the community services field, in particular youth work can include:

- death of a person who is actively working or receiving services from your organisation
- the infliction of bodily harm (including drug overdoses, alcohol related toxicity and attempted suicide)
- communicable diseases that may severely impact on operational activities of the agency as well as its worker and/or clients, e.g. diagnosis of Hepatitis B
- the intentional or wilful damage to property
- threats or physical assaults, or behaviour so bizarre or disruptive that it places others at reasonable risk of harm, or in fact causes harm
- sexual contact or attempted contact directed at a worker/client
- situations potentially generating negative publicity in the media
- car accidents occurring while at work or during working hours.

Defining emergencies

In comparison to a crisis or critical situation an emergency is a life-threatening situation that requires an immediate response. It can be defined as:

"A serious situation or occurrence that happens unexpectedly and demands immediate action or a urgent need for action or assistance".

There is often an overlap between crisis and emergency. A crisis can often develop into an emergency that requires the skills of personnel trained in the management of these situations. Appropriate personnel to respond to emergency situations are police, ambulance or fire and rescue services, hospital emergency departments or state emergency services.

The appropriate type of early response in an emergency situation is to preserve life, secure physical safety, remove a person from the source of danger, and diffuse physical violence.

Activity 1 Identifying crisis or emergency situations



Write a response

Read through the situations below and identify whether the situation is a crisis or emergency.

Situation	Crisis or Emergency
A client you have been seeing informs you that they are in some serious debt and are about to be evicted.	
Ben has turned 14 years old and has some difficulties with his changing body characteristics.	
You walk around a corner and find a person unconscious on the footpath.	
Your partner tells you that they have just been retrenched and there is little prospect of re-employment in the same profession.	
A client phones and tells you she is going to kill herself this afternoon.	
Last night a friend of yours was assaulted, briefly admitted to hospital and discharged. Your friend complains of being tired all the time and is dizzy.	
You observe a male carrying a gun and behaving in a bizarre manner.	
A person overdoses on heroin and is unconscious.	
A client threatens to physically harm another client in a detoxification unit.	
A person is caught cheating on their partner.	
A 14-year old male has just consumed a bottle of spirits and is losing consciousness.	
The police arrest a person for drink driving.	

Possible factors contributing to critical incidents

Possible factors contributing to critical incidents are as varied as the types of incidents themselves. However, there are a number of commonalities that can be linked to critical incidents, including the following:

- specific life experiences
- individual values/morals
- lack of education or positive role models
- personal addictions
- alcohol and other drug abuse
- relationship breakdowns
- child sexual assault
- victim of physical abuse
- emotionally or physical neglect
- biological factors – genetic, cognitive, neurophysiologic, chemical imbalances
- domestic and family violence
- poverty, unemployment.

Behavioural indicators of critical incidents

The earlier you can recognise that a client's behaviour is likely to result in a critical incident the earlier you can implement strategies to reduce the risks of harm or call on emergency services. Often times there are warning signs in clients that can be seen long before any type of violent act may occur.

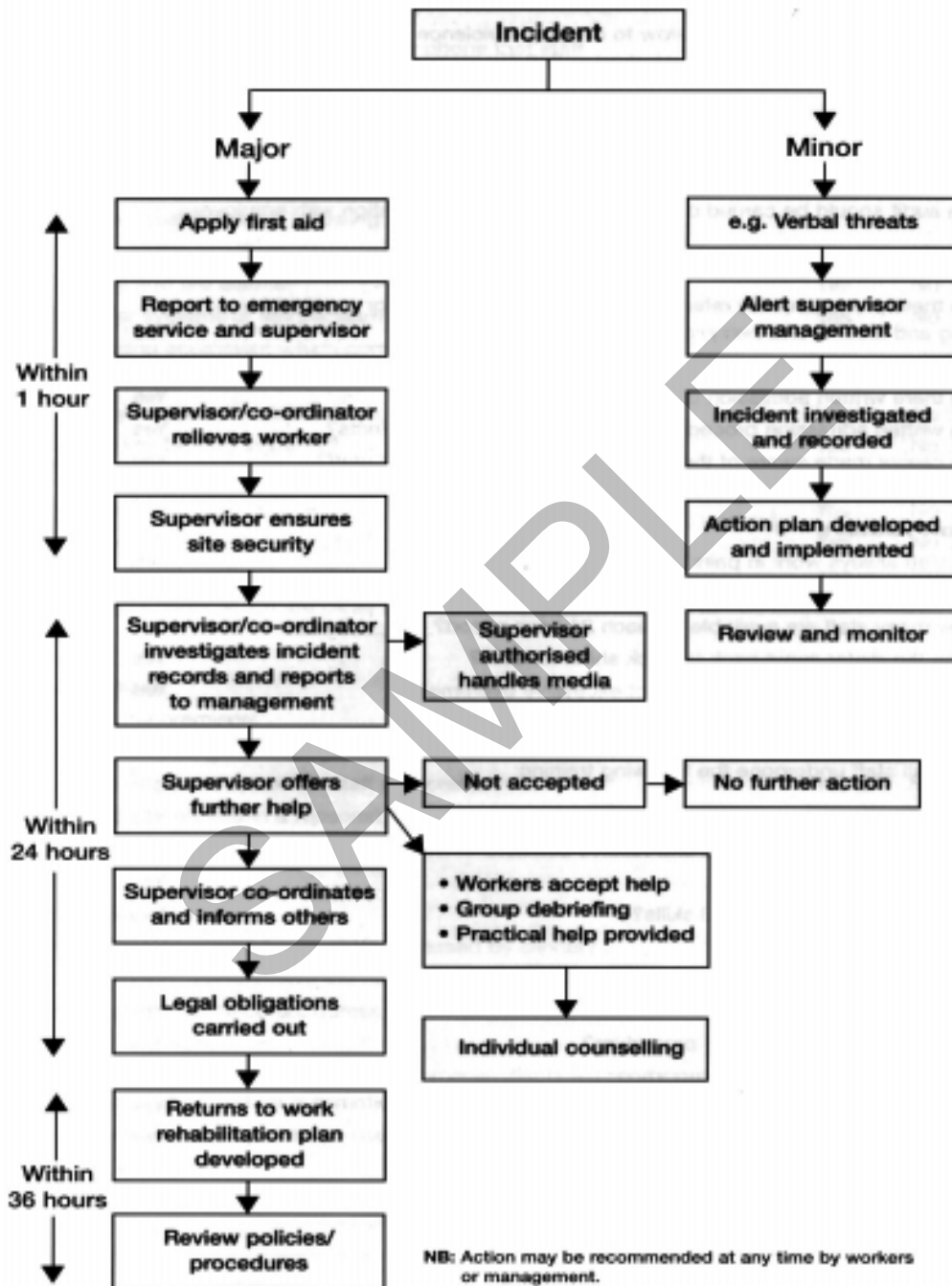
Behavioural indicators of violence

Being aware of behavioural indicators helps us identify potential incidents of escalating violence and provide early interventions. The following provides a list of common warning signs which include:

- the appearance of the client
- signs of alcohol or drug intoxication
- past history of violence or other impulsive behaviours
- suicide attempts
- destruction of property
- sexual acting out
- antisocial behaviours
- loud, clipped or angry speech
- pacing
- angry facial expressions
- refusal to communicate
- threats or gestures

Responding to a critical incident includes undertaking a series of steps, as indicated by the flow chart below.

Critical incident response chart



Source: WorkCover NSW 2006