

Big Situations – Stories for Reflection

Critical Incidents



This story refers to an accident and may raise big feelings. Before you read this, make sure this is the right time for you, and that you can access support for yourself if you need it. Should any of the information in this document cause distress for you, it may be helpful to contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636 or the Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800.

Read this story to help you be better prepared to respond to critical incidents, or if you have already encountered a situation like this and you want to hear about other educators' experiences. This is a fictional story informed by real experiences. If you are facing a situation like this now, you can find [Tips for responding now](#) and resources to support children, parents and educators in the [Big Situations](#) section of the NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency website.

No one can get in

We had a car accident outside the driveway to our car park, which brought down a power pole. Some people were hurt, the entrance to the car park was blocked, the traffic immediately backed up, our fence was badly damaged, and our power went off.

Our first reaction was to head to the window, then out the door, but we could see immediately it was quite dangerous and we needed to look after the children first. After phoning Triple 0 we could see that people were already helping. We remembered the Emerging Minds training about supporting children after a disaster or community trauma that we had completed recently, and this helped us work out how to respond.

The children didn't see the accident, but they could hear loud noises. We explained that there had been an accident outside, that we were safe, but we needed to wait for helpers to come. We said we could help the helpers by staying inside. As educators we stayed calm. We found that if we weren't looking out the windows at the accident the children weren't looking either. We kept to our usual routines and activities.

We sent a message out to all the parents and to our committee. The incident was in the afternoon, and we wanted to let parents know that their children were safe, but they might not be able to collect their children at the usual time. We emphasised that we would look after the children for as long as needed. The children had some questions about what was happening which we answered openly, in a calm way.

The emergency services came and made the site safe and looked after the people in the cars. The car park was still blocked by the cars and the pole. The police rang us and said we would need to wait until the power company came to make the pole safe, and the tow trucks moved the car. We explained to the police, that there were worried parents who would want to collect their children, and we worked out that although the car park was blocked, there was another safe way for parents to access the centre. Because it was getting dark, some of the children started to get anxious about being picked up. We explained that the emergency services were making it safe, and they would be picked up soon, and would go home to sleep that night.

We sent a message to the parents explaining how to access the service. The police ensured that they could do this safely. The parents started arriving and we could see some were quite concerned. We reassured parents that the children were safe and encouraged them to keep to their usual routine that evening. We posted an article we thought parents might find helpful. We were very tired by the end of the day but satisfied with how we had managed things. We felt that we'd supported each other and encouraged each other to stay calm.

The next day the children were a bit restless. As they had left the previous day, they had seen the emergency vehicles. They had some questions about what they had been doing, but generally they settled back into their normal routine.

Things to think about:

- ▶ Considering the diverse needs and ages of all children at your service...
 - what would educators need to do to be prepared for a critical incident like this?
 - what preparations or planning might educators need to put in place to help children cope with a critical incident like this?
- ▶ If an incident like this happened at your service, how do you think this situation would look?
- ▶ What do you think parents would need to know in an incident like this? What would children need to know?
- ▶ How prepared are you for an unexpected incident?
- ▶ How can policies and procedures support your responses and planning? Do you need to develop or review any policies or procedures?
- ▶ Who would you need to notify if a situation like this happened at your service?

The following resources can help you be better prepared for critical incidents:

- ▶ [National Mental Health Education Initiative](#) (Be You)

Access professional learning modules for educators or, to get the most benefit from Be You, sign up your service to create a learning community and access a Be You consultant from Early Childhood Australia.

- ▶ [Community Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#) (Emerging Minds)

Access short courses and resources to help educators support children following a disaster or community trauma.

Note: See additional resources on the [Critical Incidents](#) page of the Big Situations online resource.

Please remember:

An Inclusion Professional can support educators to proactively prepare to have the skills and confidence to respond to big situations that may occur. This preparation could include support to use the [Big Situations](#) resource and may involve strategic inclusion planning. It should be noted that big situations often require support from experts that sit outside the role and expertise of the Inclusion Professional. Inclusion Professionals can help you connect with external organisations and agencies as needed.

Disclaimer:

This is a fictional story informed by real experiences to support you to reflect and plan for the future. If you would like support or have any feedback on this resource please [contact us](#).