

Scenario Resources



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SETTING UP SCENARIOS

The following pages offer three separate examples of how an organization might set up critical incident (CI) scenarios that involve both in-field and mid-management staff. Each drill requires two or three players who will play key roles, but additional participants can learn by watching the exercise as non-integral observers. These drills could be arranged and used by any organization (e.g., schools, providers).

The first vignette involves a serious medically-based scenario that requires a medivac; the second describes a behavioral incident where two in-field staff are not getting along to the point that their relationship could affect safety; the third describes a lost-person incident where two students have been missing for hours, but little information is known about their whereabouts or well-being. In all three incidents, the details can easily be modified to fit your organization. For each, in-field staff will be expected to call in to their home bases to report on an incident, and office employees will be expected to collect key data or to offer advice.

While there might be a myriad of ways to address these types of situations, some actions or decisions are generally better or worse than others when it comes to handling critical incidents. For example, it is essential that certain information is accurately transferred from field to office. Most organizations realize this, but initial calls from the field often contain inaccuracies or are missing important details, even though CI plans are in place. These scenarios are created so that players will be given the chance to practice coming as close to their organization's preferred critical incident plan as possible (their bullseye).

Once employees know what is expected of them and have a chance to practice, then stress can be added to simulate the reality of true field incidents. These drills are not to punish or embarrass anyone who doesn't perform well, but just as an organization would want its in-field staff to be competent using field equipment, these drills can help employees develop competency.

OVERVIEW OF THE THREE VIGNETTES:

- 1) Medical emergency involving a student who requires an air evacuation.
- 2) Behavioral emergency involving two in-field staff who have a highly dysfunctional relationship (to the point of potentially affecting safety); and
- 3) A lost-person incident involving two students; little is known about their whereabouts.

Vignette 1

SKILLS EMPHASIZED = 1) Communicating key data from the field to the office, and (potentially) 2) Dealing with the media in the heat of the battle.

Scene: There's been a serious incident at your program which required a helicopter evacuation of a student. The helicopter has just left. You're about to call your leadership. As the phone is ringing, you see a Channel 9 news van arrive on scene.

Overall Goals: 1) Help field employees become more familiar with and practice the process of transferring key data from the field to the office during an emergency. 2) Help organizations clarify expectations when it comes to field communication, including speaking to the media.

Objectives: By the end of this drill, employees should be more adept at accurately transferring key data in an emergency. They should have strong knowledge of the most important information that their organization wants to be passed along—from field to office—following any medical serious incident. By the end of the drill, employees should be more familiar with common errors that can and do occur during this step of the CI plan, and they will have ideas for how to avoid the errors (such as by using a cheat sheet).

Writing the scenario: This exercise involves a medical emergency and transport. To start, organizations will need to come up with a realistic incident that would require a helicopter rescue from one of your field sites. The more details you can provide, the better, such as: Student's name, gender, and age (school year); a list of the patient's injuries; the location of the patient and location of incident; the status of everyone else (is anyone else hurt? Are bystanders upset?). Provide a basic summary of what happened to the injured student; how did he/she get hurt? The severity of injury will/should trigger different responses.

Authors should create a basic story line of 1-2 pages that provides enough details so that participants who read it can realistically imagine the scene. The people who participate in the drill should know how much experience/training the students had had at the time of the accident. They should know what time the accident happened. They should know what the students were doing or trying to do at the time of the incident; they should know if the student was conscious or unconscious after the event, and they should know how concerned everyone is (is this a big deal or a little deal?).

Depending on what you want to teach, you can decide if the in-field staff actually witnessed the event or if they only heard about it from someone else, which means they are relying on ambiguous witness statements.

Players: You will need at least two players—the field staff (who makes the call) and the office staff (the person who receives the call), and potentially a media representative. Everyone else can be fishbowl participants.

Setting up the exercise: The scene will involve an in-field staff calling in to their office or home base and passing along key details of the accident, and this drill will test to see how well they can do this without prompts and/or under pressure. This has been written so that the person calling in to announce the incident is the one being tested, but with minimal modifications this drill could be set up so that the person receiving the call is the one being tested.

Prior to the start of the drill, the in-field staff (caller) should be given the written account of the scenario, with at least 10-15 minutes to read it. It is okay to leave the document semi-long with a lot of details since the point is to make the in-field staff differentiate important details vs. fluff. Before the scenario begins, the caller (as well as fish-bowl audience members) should be asked to write down what they think are the most important points that they will want to forward to their employers.

If organizations send laminated cheat sheets into the field (i.e., short bullet point lists that field employees can use), then callers can use the cheat sheets to guide their calls.

The in-field staff will then make a simulated call to the office, with the two role players in different rooms/locations. The information the call taker ultimately receives should reflect the information the organization would like from its employees. For example, the bullseye might require that they accurately pass along the exact location of patient and of the group, the status of patient, including severity of injury, and the status of bystanders/students. The caller might be expected to identify what, if anything, they need, and they should coordinate next contact.

Running the drill: This drill could be conducted during a staff training session or orientation. It could be conducted with only a couple of people, with the intent to hone familiarity with the organization's CI plan, or it could be conducted with all staff, with some employees serving as observers. The drill does not take long to conduct, but time for a debrief—with feedback—should be included.

Adding stress over time: There are a variety of ways to add stress to this vignette.

Videotaping the session is an excellent way to help people take the drill seriously, and it is a good learning tool for the debrief. Adults are generally more stressed when they are asked to 1) perform a new skill, 2) perform in front of an audience of their peers, and/or 3) are evaluated. Videotaping their performance with a public debrief includes the stress of all three.

Lack of information, confusing information, and surprises all add stress. When the employee calls in, they will feel stressed if they cannot answer questions, such as, Where did the helicopter take the patient? Which hospital? When will they arrive? If this information was not included in the scenario, it can add stress. Incorporating a bad/spotty phone connection can add stress. Interruptions add stress, so you might intentionally include phone static, a dropped call, or other.

The office role player can add stress by coming across as unhelpful or frustrated, or by repeating what they heard incorrectly. (Ideally the office person would repeat what they hear, and they would repeat it perfectly.) They might also interrupt the caller several times, which can add stress.

Again, the goal is for all employees—in-field staff as well as office personnel—to be adept at knowing who to call, what to say, and how to proceed following a serious incident. With practice, employees should be able to do accurately, as if it is routine ... even if/when they are being inundated with chaos.

Vignette 2

SKILL EMPHASIZED = Managing behavioral issues that have escalated to the point of dysfunction. (This conflict involves field staff and teacher, and now a principle).

Scene: You are coordinating four groups in the field, and to reach them it will take about 45 minutes. You were planning on visiting one group in particular as you've had concerns about how your staff member and the accompanying teacher are working together. Your staff member has told you they are feeling bullied by the school staff. As you're heading to the group, you receive a text from your boss asking you to call in. Your boss tells you that they just received a call from the school Principal saying that they are worried about your staff member's competency (they got a call from their teacher). The teacher said he can't work with them anymore. You decide you need to talk to your staff member about the situation.

Overall goals: The goal of this drill is to provide staff with ideas and practice regarding how to handle difficult behavioral challenges as they are unfolding. These could be between staff and students, students and student, or staff and staff. If behavioral incidents are included in an organization's CI plan, then an organization's preferred steps for dealing with these types of incidents should be included and emphasized. Additionally, this drill can help employees think through and practice de-escalation or negotiation skills.

Objectives: By the end of this drill, employees should have a better understanding of what their organizations expect when it comes to handling challenging behavioral issues. Additionally, in-field staff and managers will have the chance to observe and practice different approaches when it comes to behavioral incidents.

Writing a behavioral scenario: To start, organizations should create a realistic scenario involving a behavioral issue that cannot easily be resolved. It is more challenging when there is no obvious wrong-doing and no obvious culprit.

For example, this scene might involve a teacher who is something of a “know it all.” He has quite a bit of personal outdoor experience, all of which impresses the students. (The students look up to him and trust him regarding safety.) The in-field staff has been hired as the outdoor expert, but she is younger than the teacher and fairly new to the outdoor profession.

The two leaders sometimes bicker about how to do things, such as put up a tent or start a fire. The teacher’s way isn’t wrong—it’s the way he learned how to do it—but it differs from the in-field staff’s way, so he tends to confront the staff in front of the students. Things have gotten so bad that the in-field staff feels the need to talk to someone about what’s been happening. Neither the teacher nor the principal are happy with how things are going, either.

Players: This scenario only requires two players, an in-field staff and their boss. The in-field staff member will call in to talk to the boss about the situation. The field person will probably have already tried many things, none of which works, so the person’s frustration should come through. The intent is to test person receiving the call (the boss) and to give them the opportunity to practice their listening, leadership, de-escalation, and negotiation skills.

Running the drill: In this vignette, you are trying to help provide mid-managers and field staff with guidance and practice in dealing with challenging behavioral issues that can and do happen in the field. The person calling in (in-field staff) will play the provocateur, or someone who is potentially frustrated and exasperated. The person who calls in will be in control of how easy or difficult to make the encounter, and they can easily add or reduce stress by their answers and tone.

The person receiving the call is the one on the hotseat. They will be expected to try to problem-solve and deescalate the situation while others observe.

During the debrief, small groups can identify potentially idyllic ways to handle this type of situation. What qualities are required to hit the bullseye when it comes to handling this situation? Are there any “absolutely not” behaviors? Audience members can be used to identify behaviors, tones, and words that would hit the target but miss the bullseye, thus helping employees develop a better understanding of what’s desirable while also allowing them to practice difficult skills in a safe environment.

Adding stress over time: Because it is more difficult to identify a ‘right way’ to respond in this type of scenario, this drill can feel fairly stressful and frustrating as it is, with no additional and intentional stress added. If you want to add stress, you should write a scenario where there are no easy answers and no obvious right or wrong. When there are no easy solutions, then the manager’s primary responsibility would be to practice their listening skill and to help the in-field staff by providing ideas and confidence from afar.

Vignette 3

SKILL EMPHASIZED = Managing a lost person incident with no or limited information.

Scene: It's 6:30 a.m. and a program coordinator gets a call from a field staff member informing them that two students were not in their tents this morning. The two field leaders don't know where the students are, but their bags are also gone, so it looks like the escape/separation was planned. It's an alpine environment and the temperature dipped to minus 1c overnight.

Overall Goals: The overall goal of this drill is for organizations to clarify expectations regarding lost-person incidents, and to ensure that field and office employees know what steps should be taken (immediately and over time) if a student is separated from a group—intentionally or accidentally.

Objectives: By the end of this drill, employees should better understand what is expected of them should a team member go missing. They should be able to identify when these incidents can be managed in-house and when outside help should be requested, meaning field and office employees should know who to call, what to say, and what to do in the minutes and hours following a missing-person event, whether the person is an employee or student.

Setting up the exercise: To start, organizations should write/create a realistic incident storyline that could happen within their programs. The more details you can provide, the better, such as student's name, gender, and age (school year). Location of incident. Location and status of other students and teacher/staff.

Similar to how you might write a medical-based scenario, authors should write up a 1-2 page document that outlines the details. Anyone dealing with this scenario would likely want background information about the students' mental health, physical health, point last seen, direction of travel, and gear they might have with them. Field staff likely would know how much experience/training the students has had at the time of the incident; they should know what day of the trip it is. They should know the background of the students and the purpose of the trip. They should know what the students were doing or trying to do at the time of the incident.

Players: This scenario only requires two participants—the in-field staff who makes the initial call, and the office personnel who takes the call—but more can be added, depending on your goals. Additional people can be fishbowl participants. The person on the hotseat (the one being tested) can either be the in-field staff or office personnel, but they should not both be tested in the same scenario.

Running the exercise: In preparation, the in-field staff member should be given a written scenario with all the details and background about the trip and the kids, and they should be given time to read it. They would likely know what the students took/had with them, they would likely know the terrain, and they would likely know the weather. These details should be

included. The person who receives the call should receive no information prior to the call other than the program's name, rationale, and a bit about the outing.

If you want to test the field staff, then the scenario and questions should be directed to that player, meaning, you should test them to see if how well they followed their organization's CI plan and if they know how to proceed. Similarly, if you want to test the office personnel (anyone who might receive this type of call), then you should organize the scene so that that person is on the hotseat, and you can test to see if they know what information to collect and what steps should follow.

This type of incident would almost certainly need to be moved up the food chain within an organization, so a version of this scenario could also be used with upper management, and management could be tested on how this incident would be communicated to the various/key actors.

If upper management takes the role of one of the players, then they can be tested on their ability to collect and pass along important data, as outlined by the organization's CI plan. This drill can help them understand their role in this type of event, and it can provide an opportunity for them to practice collecting and passing along key pieces of data to loved ones or others. This might be especially difficult if key pieces of information are missing, such as the status/health of the students.

Adding stress over time. You can add stress to this drill in a variety of ways, such as by adding environmental hazards. For example, the scene would seem more dangerous if the students were missing in difficult terrain, inclement weather, darkness, etc. This would be even more stressful if the student(s) didn't have appropriate equipment or experience. It would be more stressful if more than one person is missing, but the people are not together.

Critical Incident Response Scenario Template 2024

Chain of Events

Scenario Facilitator:

Date scenario conducted:

Scenario Start Time: XX:XX am/pm

Roles	Acting - staff name	Contact (Phone)
Cabin Mate - Stephanie		
Group Leader		
Next of Kin		
Centre Manager		
Senior Manager - On Call		
Reception 1		
Journalist 1		
Journalist 2		
Parent 1 (Michelle)		

Context Notes:

- It's 9:50am and the Group Leader (NAME HERE) is approached by Stephanie, a student who informs them that their cabin mate Sarah wasn't in their cabin that morning.
- Year 7 Holiday Camp program
- Program Length – 5 days
- Day 2 of 5 days
- Group Size: 6 groups of approx. 15
- Weather is cold and wet with snow forecast

Background:

Stephanie says that Sarah wasn't happy and kept saying last night that she missed her big sister. She last saw Sarah about 10pm when they all went to bed. She apparently just kept saying that she was forced to come to this holiday camp. Note: Stephanie is quite uneasy and not that happy to be talking about it.

Briefing Notes:

General observers

- We want you to make detailed observations of what you're seeing unfold including timeline, tone, level of urgency, clarity of communication flow etc

Staff in normal roles

- We want you to do what you normally do. You'll likely receive a call about an incident that is happening. Please respond as you normally would.

Reception staff

- This role will be the initial contact for external people calling in regarding this incident. Deal with as best you can and do what you think needs to be done Good Luck!

New staff to organisation

- We want you to buddy up with the Senior Manager and get an insight into the executive, administrative response. We want you to make observations of what you're seeing unfold including timeline, tone, level of urgency, clarity of communication flow etc.

Stephanie (Cabin Mate)

- Your best friend Sarah who has come on Holiday Camp is not in her bed this morning. You're very anxious and worried about your friend. You dissolve into tears and just answer the questions you are asked. After you get a nod from us, you say that you know Sarah left sometime after 2am and that she made you promise not to say anything but now you're really worried about her.

Mary (Next of Kin) - You'll likely get one of two scenarios play out – I will text you which.

- Scenario 1 -you have either been called by someone at OFFICE and told your daughter is missing and asked if she was with you. You have a very normal shocked response. How could this have happened??! You want to be reassured and get regular updates about what they actually know and keep you up to date. If you don't get that you keep getting very emotional (e.g., She doesn't have a phone, omg I should have given her one!). You're ready to get in your car and go there.
 - Scenario 2 – Stephanie's mum texted you after Stephanie texted her from camp saying what's going on. You've called Reception (NUMBER HERE) as you can't find the number of the camp online. What the hell is happening – I've heard my daughter is missing?! Why haven't I been called? What sort of place is this??!
-

Order of Calls

Centre Manager (name) calls Senior Manager - On Call (name)

Call #1 Start Clock –

Name (Centre Manager) calls from the site. Reports of a student missing from the Centre. Hasty search conducted but no sight of the student. Name of the student is Sarah Jones (ONLY SAY NAME IF ASKED).

Her cabin mate Stephanie says that Sarah wasn't happy and kept saying last night that she missed her big sister. She last saw Sarah about 10pm when they all went to bed. She apparently just kept saying that she was forced to come to this holiday camp.

"We've done a hasty search but there's no sight of Sarah. I'm pretty worried about this. The weather as you know is terrible today".

Only if asked: Parents or police have not been contacted yet as you wanted to let you know first. You ask if it's possible for them to decide on when to contact parents, as you're flat out organising the search.

Call # 2 - Approximately 15 mins later

"All cabins and buildings directly around the centre are being checked but so far, no luck. We have sent out some staff along the road as well in vehicles to look for her. We've got radio contact with them."

"What's the update on the parents?"

Call #3 – 10 mins later

Centre Manager – (you're pretty stressed). You've got a major update – "Stephanie just told me that Sarah said she was actually planning on leaving at 3:30am and that she made her cabin mates promise not to tell. She took some food at dinner and said she had some clothes so it would be ok. The cabin mate is now really upset and worried that Sarah might die in the bush. I knew these holiday programs were bad news – Head Office just keeps taking names and we don't do enough checking."

Once you've communicated this, yell out in the background that **I'll be right there** – Someone has told you the police are here and want to speak to you. You've got to go – rush so you can get off call.

Call #4 – Scenario Facilitator lets the room know a call is coming in and who is to take it.

Journalist 1 (name) calls in

We have seen on Twitter that there is a missing student at your Centre. You must be very worried they are out in the elements? How could a child simply go missing? What sort of security do you have there? Aren't your cabin doors locked at night? Has there been budget cuts there too? I see your website says your holiday camps are trusted? Really? Have you contacted the family of the missing child?

Call # 5 - Approximately 15 mins later

Centre Manager (name) calls Senior Manager - On Call (name)

Centre Manager: The Police are getting organised now and they've asked if we have any off-duty staff who can come and help. I'll organise that. I'm getting calls down here now from locals too saying they've heard what's happening and want to help.

We've just got a call from someone from 7News saying they're on the way to the centre as they've heard we've lost a student and are going live to air and need a comment. What should we tell them?

Call #6 –

Journalist 2 (name) calls Reception

It's Madeline from SydneyLive called your 13 number but couldn't get through. Someone in your office gave me this number. I'm going to press in 15 and need to confirm that you haven't found the child yet? I'm on my way to your 3:30 pm presser.

Call #7 –

Parent 1 Michelle (name) calls into Reception

I called the camp number but couldn't get through. My daughter just texted me to say that her cabin mate has gone missing and that she's getting the blame! What the hell is going on there? I'm sending my father up right away to get her.

Critical Incident Contact Card

Critical Incident Contact Information

Have the following information ready to share or receive in an Critical Incident:

	Name and location of caller
	Nature and severity of emergency
	Name, status, and location of patient(s)
	Brief summary of what happened
	Status of everyone else
	What do you need at this time?
	Confirm details with other caller

2023

Contact Details



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