



Crisis Manual

**Crisis Management Manual with Simulated Crisis
Management Activity**

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Introduction

This Crisis Manual is for Johnsons Coaches, one of the leading UK-based transportation companies offering holidays, day excursions, coach services, and private hire. Given the public-facing nature of the business, it is our responsibility to ensure passenger safety, protect the company's reputation, support the wider community, and uphold stakeholder interests.

This manual will provide a step-by-step guide for how Johnsons Coaches should plan for, respond to, and recover from a wide range of crisis events. These include critical, high-risk, emergency/moderate, and low-risk crises.

The manual is designed to be used by the Crisis Response Team, senior managers, and key staff involved in public relations and safety operations. The aim is to respond to any crisis quickly, minimise harm to passengers and the company's reputation, maintain public trust, and ensure accurate information is communicated to the media, the public, and all stakeholders.

Types of Crises and Risk Categorisation

Crisis Level	Definition	Examples
Level 1: Critical – Immediate Crisis	Requires an all-hands-on-deck approach, potentially causing disaster or a major threat to Johnsons Coaches.	• Bus accident • Bus fire • Bus hijacking and terrorist attack • Natural Disaster • Passenger death due to attack or injury • Major medical emergency onboard • Drunk driving incident • Cyberattack or data breach • Fire in office or depot - Natural Disaster
Level 2: High Risk – Significant Long-term Impact	May not be immediately catastrophic but poses serious risks to operations or reputation.	• Mechanical/electrical fault (safety risk) • Offensive PR incident • Legal/regulatory non-compliance • Staff misconduct (e.g., harassment) • Environmental incident (e.g., fuel spill) • Financial mismanagement
Level 3: Moderate Risk – Emerging Crisis	Not an immediate disaster but requires close monitoring to prevent escalation.	• Ticketing issues • Failure to deliver itinerary • Minor staff misconduct • Industrial action/strike • Inconsistent service quality
Level 4: Low Risk – Reputational or Service Issue	Routine issues that are not business-threatening but require a structured response.	• Comfort complaints • Negative social media reviews • Customer complaints about staff attitude • Negative Glassdoor reviews

(Coombs, 2023; Team Lewis, 2020)

Pre-Crisis – Planning

Preparation before a crisis happens will allow Johnsons Coaches to protect passengers, staff, minimise disruption, protect stakeholders, and respond faster. This section includes key actions that must be taken before any crisis occurs, following the Research phase of the RACE framework (Gregory, 2015).

Identify Key Risks

Review and categorise potential crises using likelihood x impact matrix (see Appendix E).

Critical Crises

High risk Crises

Moderate Crises

Low-Risk Crises

Regular risk scanning enables better prioritisation of resources and communication planning (Broom & Sha, 2012; Dowling, 1986). Identifying vulnerabilities in advance supports quicker mobilisation and reduces decision fatigue during crisis activation (Heath, 1997).

Activate a Crisis Response Team

Assign a dedicated Crisis Response Team (see Appendix A) with clear roles and updated contact information. Responsibilities must be pre-assigned, covering -

Leadership and internal decision making

Passenger and staff safety

Media, stakeholder and public communication

Digital systems and operational recovery

Legal, financial, and reputational risk

Team structure should be consistent and action driven, reducing confusion during early response stages (Gregory, 2015). Authority lines and escalation routes must be understood across departments (Tench & Yeomans, 2021). Role clarity also reflects professional standards in crisis PR planning (CIPR, n.d.).

Prepare Communication Templates

Ensure all templates are updated and ready to use immediately -

Media Holding Statement (Appendix B)
News Release Template (Appendix C)
Social Media Response Template (Appendix D)

These statements must be pre-approved. Only designated spokespersons should handle all public communication to maintain consistency and credibility (Coombs, 2015). Internal guidance should be provided to all staff to avoid sharing unauthorised content online or with news platforms (PRSA, n.d.).

Train Staff Across Departments

Staff at all levels must be equipped to act calmly and quickly -

Crisis response drills
Internal escalation training for frontline teams
Spokesperson media training
Scenario walkthroughs using real Johnsons Coaches operations

Practical training supports quicker activation and prevents breakdown of protocol under pressure (Coombs, 2015). Consistency in crisis behaviour enhances both safety and brand trust (Gregory, 2015).

During the Crisis - Activation & Strategy

When a crisis occurs, the crisis team must act quickly to contain the situation, protect passengers and staff, and maintain public confidence. This section outlines the step-by-step response process once a crisis has been confirmed (Gregory, 2015).

Activate the Crisis Response Plan

The plan must be activated immediately by the most senior manager available, once the situation meets the criteria of a Level 1 or 2 (See Appendix E). The General Manager or designated deputy is responsible for -

- Confirming the nature and scale of the crisis
- Alerting all Crisis Response Team members (See Appendix A)
- Logging the activation time, location and actions taken
- Informing important departments of restricted access or pause operations if required.

Rapid activation reduces delays and confusion, a key issue in early crisis failures (Coombs, 2015).

Coordinate Internal Response

- Report crisis role to all the key team members immediately
- Follow their pre-assigned responsibilities (See Appendix A)
- Provide live updates to the General Manager or Incident Commander
- Ensure team-wide communication remains confidential and factual.

Internal alignment is critical to reduce inconsistent actions across teams (Tench & Yeomans, 2021).

Assign and Support the Spokesperson

Only the assigned spokesperson [need to be decided depending on the type of crisis] should handle external communication.

- Issue a holding statement within the first hour (Appendix B)
- Prepare a news release once key facts are confirmed (Appendix C)
- Respond to media using pre-approved language
- Speak clearly, calmly, and without speculation

Clear and consistent messaging helps protect organisational credibility (Coombs, 2015; Gregory, 2015). This aligns with PR best practices for managing the flow of public facing information during uncertainty (Seitel, 2019)

Control the Social Media Narrative

The social media team should act fast to contain panic and disinformation -

- Post the initial update using the template in Appendix D
- Monitor hashtags, mentions, and fake news
- Avoid replying to speculation or public comments
- Only publish pre-approved updates

All messaging should be coordinated with the spokesperson. Social media crises escalate quickly if not managed (PRSA, n.d.).

Coordinate with External Agencies

If emergency services are involved, the relevant Crisis Team members must -

- Provide accurate information to responders
- Support evacuation
- Comply with all legal and safety guidance

Collaboration with external authorities also reinforces public trust (Tech & Yeomans, 2021). Legal and safety officers should document all contact with outside bodies for accountability.

Communicate with Passengers, Families, and Stakeholders

Passengers, their families, and key stakeholders must receive timely, and honest updates

Only appointed spokesperson or customer service agent assigned should -

- Contact affected passengers or families directly where appropriate
- Offer access to support services (medical, emotional, travel, or financial)
- Provide helpline details or dedicated contact point
- Publish updates on the official website, via email, and through relevant channels

Messages should focus on empathy, safety, and accountability (Tench & Yeomans, 2021). Keeping the public informed prevents confusion, lowers panic, and helps protect long-term trust (Coombs, 2015).

Post Crisis - Recovery & Evaluation

Once the crisis is under control team members must focus on restoring trust, supporting those affected, and learning from what happened. This phase ensures that both people and the organisation are cared for, while also preventing the same issue from repeating.

Support and Follow-up with Passengers, Families, and Stakeholders

Passengers, their families, and impacted stakeholders must receive personal and compassionate follow-up.

- Reach out to affected individuals with updates and support.
- Offer financial compensation where appropriate e.g. full or partial refunds, travel vouchers, or goodwill payments.
- Arrange medical assistance and emotional support service for passengers or staff injured or traumatised.
- Provide continued access to a support helpline until the case is closed.
- Share final updates via email, press release, and direct communication.

Support must be tailored to the situation and handled with care. Public science after a crisis can damage trust further (Coombs, 2015)

Reassurance, accountability, and openness will help rebuild confidence among the public and partners (Gregory, 2015). Long-term trust is also shaped by how organisations manage consent and perception in the aftermath (Bernays, 1955).

Public Reputation Management

A final press release should be issued once the situation has been fully addressed.

All messages should -

- Stay consistent with initial statements.
- Avoid blame-shifting
- Focus on resolution, not repetition
- Show that Johnsons Coaches is learning from the event

This improves brand credibility and helps shift the narrative from crisis to recovery (Tench & Yeomans, 2021).

Internal Review and Documentation

Every department involved must be a part of formal debrief. The discussion should be to reflect on what worked, what didn't, how to prevent similar crisis and how to improve future response.

The Risk & Training Manager should:

- Lead the internal review within 48-72 hours after the incident
- Collect feedback from all departments
- Update contact sheets, escalation procedures, and communication templates
- Document actions taken during the crisis for internal records

Conducting a proper post-crisis evaluation builds resilience and reduces repeat failures (Heath, 1997). This reflective approach supports internal learning and continuous improvement (Marston, 1997).

Update the Crisis Management Plan

Crisis Manual must be reviewed and updated with lessons learned.

- Revising the scenario matrix if new risks are identified
- Adding new contacts or updating responsibilities
- Improving clarity in templates or activation steps
- Recommending new training for teams

A crisis is never just an event, it is an opportunity to strengthen the system (Gregory, 2015)

Justification

This manual is structured using the RACE framework (Gregory, 2015) to create a practical, step-by-step process for Johnsons Coaches to follow during a crisis. The framework breaks down crisis response into four stages - Research, Action, Communication, and Evaluation. Each phase helps the organisation prepare, respond, and recover in a way that protects people and reputation of the company.

The Crisis Response Team was included to ensure that roles are clearly defined and decisions can be made quickly. Assigning responsibilities in advance reduces confusion and delays during activation (Tench & Yeomans, 2021). Templates for media, news, and social media were included to help maintain consistency across all communication (Coombs, 2015). These tools form the backbone of structured media communication strategies (Tench & Waddington, 2021). This is especially important during fast-moving situations when misinformation can spread easily.

Families, passengers, and stakeholders were treated as central to the response strategy, not an afterthought. Public science or slow updates damage trust more than the crisis itself (PRSA, n.d.). By focusing on empathy, clarity, and support, Johnsons Coaches can protect both its people and its reputation.

Each part of this manual is designed to be realistic, actionable, and grounded in best practice. It reflects how modern organisations must think, being ready, being human, and being clear in the face of disruption. The approach also considers brand, reputation, and stakeholder alignment throughout the crisis cycle (Fill & Roper, 2012).

AI Usage Declaration Table

Tool	How used in this assignment
ChatGPT (OpenAI)	Used to help structure the manual, clarify wording, insert academic references, and check grammar.
Microsoft Word	Used for formatting, spell checking, and document layout.
Grammarly	Used to support final proofreading for grammar consistency.

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Appendix List

Appendix A - Crisis Response Team Contact Directory

Name	Designation	Crisis Role & Responsibility	Email	Contact Number
Ashley Brown	General Manager	Overall crisis leadership; decision-making authority	ashley.b@johnsons.co.uk	07700 900101
John Hatch	Head of Engineering	Leads vehicle/infrastructure safety response	john.h@johnsons.co.uk	07700 900102
Andy Leyland	Head of Finance	Manages insurance and financial continuity	andy.l@johnsons.co.uk	07700 900103
Gary Harridence	Coach Hire Team Manager	Coordinates transport reroutes and service alerts	gary.h@johnsons.co.uk	07700 900104
Barry Cobb	Tours Manager	Liaises with travel partners and trip stakeholders	barry.c@johnsons.co.uk	07700 900105
Elizabeth Lee	Reservations & Club Manager	Handles booking issues and loyalty concerns	elizabeth.l@johnsons.co.uk	07700 900106
Nicole Smith	PA to the Directors	Documents crisis actions, maintains records	nicole.s@johnsons.co.uk	07700 900107
Bethany Morgan	Marketing Manager	Leads media communications; official spokesperson	bethany.m@johnsons.co.uk	07700 900108
Sam Blatherwick	Traffic Manager	Manages on-ground transport flow and drivers	sam.b@johnsons.co.uk	07700 900109

Peter Lloyd	Risk, Training & Development Manager	Leads crisis training and post-crisis evaluations	peter.l@johnsons.co.uk	07700 900110
Rachel Owens	Legal Advisor (External)	Handles legal and regulatory guidance	rachel.o@johnsonslegal.co.uk	07700 900111
Mark Patel	IT Systems & Cybersecurity Lead	Coordinates digital safety and system recovery	mark.p@johnsons.co.uk	07700 900112

Appendix B - Media Holding Statement Template

Johnsons Coaches Confirms [Type of Incident] at [Location]

[Date and Time]

We can confirm that earlier today at approximately [insert time], one of our coaches was involved in an incident near [insert location]. At this time, our priority is the safety and wellbeing of our passengers, driver, and all individuals affected.

Emergency services were called immediately and arrived at the scene. We are working closely with them to understand what happened and to support those involved. We can confirm that [insert brief details about injuries or impact if known”].

We know this is a deeply upsetting situation, and our thoughts are with everyone affected. We are in direct contact with the families of those involved and will continue to offer support as more information becomes available.

An internal investigation is underway, and we will cooperate fully with the authorities as they carry out their work.

We ask for patience and understanding as we confirm the facts. We will provide updates as soon as we are able to.

For further enquiries, please contact:

Bethany Morgan

Marketing & Communications Manager

Email: bethany.m@johnsons.co.uk

Phone: 07700 900108

Appendix C - News Release Template

[Type of Incident] Involving Johnsons Coaches Confirmed that all the [number of people involved in the incident and what happened to them]
[Issue Date and Time].

Johnsons Coaches has confirmed details of an incident that occurred on [insert date] at approximately [insert time], involving [insert crisis incident].

Emergency services responded quickly, and all passengers and staff have now been accounted for [modify and mention if any death or serious injury happened to any passenger or staff member or any bystanders].

Initial investigations suggest that the incident was caused by [insert brief cause if known, or say “cause is under investigation”]. A total of [insert number] individuals received medical attention.[insert status of injuries/fatalities, if confirmed and appropriate].

“Our first priority is always the safety of our passengers and team,” said [insert name and title of senior spokesperson]. “We are deeply sorry for the distress caused and are committed to supporting everyone affected. We are also working closely with the relevant authorities to understand what happened.” [if there are any deaths show remorse/empathy and mention any financial, medical, mental or social help which will be given to them].

Johnsons Coaches has activated its full crisis response plan. The affected service has been suspended, and alternative arrangements have been made [mention what alternative arrangements are made] for impacted passengers and staff members. The company is also offering support to families and employees involved in the incident.

Further updates will be provided as more information becomes available

Media enquiries:

Bethany Morgan

Marketing & Communication Manager

Email - bethany.m@johnsons.co.uk

Phone - 07700 900108

Appendix D – Social Media Statement Template

We confirm there has been a [type of incident] near [location] involving [include facility or vehicle details].

Emergency services are on the scene and our teams are responding. Passenger safety is our top priority.

We will provide verified updates as soon as more information becomes available.

Thank you for your understanding and support.

- The Johnsons Coaches Team

Appendix E - Scenario Planning Matrix (Likelihood x Impact)

This matrix helps Johnsons Coaches prioritise its crisis planning based on how likely each type of event is to occur and how severe the impact could be.

Likelihood ↓ / Impact →	Low Impact	Moderate Impact	High Impact	Severe Impact
High Likelihood	Customer complaint goes viral Negative review storm	Last-minute driver shortage Minor vehicle breakdown	Data breach affecting customer info Website outage	On-road coach accident with injuries Coach breakdown stranding passengers Natural disaster impacting local travel
Moderate Likelihood	Local route delays due to traffic	Driver misconduct (non-criminal) Missed booking confirmations	Minor fire (engine overheat) Technical fault during trip	Major medical emergency on board System-wide booking failure
Low Likelihood	Low-impact social media rumour	Cancelled day trip due to weather	Fuel shortage impacting operations Major cyberattack attempt	Fire at depot or HQ Natural disaster affecting multiple services
Rare / Unlikely	Unexpected road closure	Mild protest or external disruption	Legal dispute made public	Passenger fatality during service Multi-vehicle crash involving coach Terrorism-related hijack or attack