

## **Scoil Naomh Caitríona, Critical Incident Policy**

### **What is a Critical Incident?**

'A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school'.

### **Examples:**

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease
- Criminal incidents
- Major accidents, serious injury
- Suicide
- Fire, natural and technological disaster
- Disappearance of pupil from home or school
- Unauthorised removal of pupil from school or home.

### **Critical Incidents Management Team:**

**Leadership Role:** Claire O'Donovan (Principal), Aisling Daly (Deputy Principal)

**Staff Liaison:** Aisling Daly, Sinéad Aherne

**Communication Role:** Claire O'Donovan and Kathryn Smith

**Pupil Liaison/ Counselling Role:** Niamh Murphy and Karen Kellegher

**Chaplaincy Role:** Fr. Dónal Cotter (Parish Administrator) and Siobhán Lynch

**Family Liaison Role:** Claire O'Donovan/Class Teacher

**Garda Liaison Role:** Aoife Hayes

**Administrator:** Deirdre Cronin (Rúnaí)

The first-named person has the responsibility as defined.

The second-named person assists and only assumes responsibility on the absence of the first-named.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **Leadership Role:**

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school). If deemed necessary, staff will be contacted individually by a member of the leadership team.

#### **Staff Liaison Role:**

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions. Outline the routine for the day
- Provide materials for staff -NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools
- Keep staff updated as day progresses
- Decide with Principal how news will be communicated to different groups (pupils, outside school, media)

#### **Communication Role:**

- With Team, prepare a public statement
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

#### **Pupil Liaison/ Counselling Role:**

- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Information: decide what information is to be given and how it will be communicated
- Provide information
- Contact NEPS re counselling

#### **Chaplaincy Role:**

- Visit home(s), if appropriate
- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff

**Family Liaison Role:**

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any pupil affected by critical incident

**Garda Liaison Role:**

- Liaise with Garda and emergency services
- Confirm the event
- Clarify facts around the event

**Administrator:**

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of parents, teachers, staff, emergency services.
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need a response.
- Ensures that template letters are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts.
- Photocopies materials as needed.
- Maintains records.

**Record Keeping**

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc. The school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters/emails/texts, photocopying materials, etc.

**Confidentiality and good name considerations**

School personnel have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of people involved in any incident and the consequences of public statements. Staff will bear this in mind, and ensure that pupils do so also, e.g. the term 'suicide' will not be used unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, and that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead. The word 'murder' should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term 'violent death' may be used instead.

## **ACTION PLAN**

### **SHORT-TERM ACTIONS: Day One**

- Immediate contact with family/families
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, sisters of injured in the school etc.
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for pupils/staff (meeting room).
- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team
- Organise a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Pupil Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of pupils
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- The Chaplain/Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Principal and Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

### **Media Briefing (if appropriate)**

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Team)
- Protect the family's privacy
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident
  1. What happened, where and when?
  2. What is the extent of the injuries?
  3. How many are involved and what are their names?
  4. Is there a risk of further injury?
  5. What agencies have been contacted already?
- Contact appropriate agencies: See Appendix A
  1. Emergency services
  2. Medical services
  3. H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
  4. NEPS
- Cf. sample announcement CIRM for schools p.9 an announcement for the media may be faxed or emailed to the relevant person/ organisation or the information may be communicated face to face.

## **MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)**

- Preparation of pupils/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of pupils/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of pupils/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/pupils/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable pupils
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual pupils, groups of pupils, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/pupils, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission
- Plan for the re-integration of pupils and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- Pupil Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
  - Family Liaison person, Class Teacher and Principal to visit home/hospital
  - Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
  - Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- School closure (if appropriate)
- Request a decision on this from school management

## **LONGER TERM ACTIONS**

Monitor pupils for signs of continuing distress

If over a prolonged period of time, a pupil continues to display the following, she may need assistance from the Health Board. Constant communication with family is essential.

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism

Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately

- What went well?
- Where were the gaps?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?

Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents (where appropriate, be sure to note incident on Aladdin)
- Ensure that new staff are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the Principal should brief the Principal of the new school

Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (Be sensitive to special days and events)

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in pupils/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day
- Plan a school memorial service
- Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
- Update and amend school records

Drawn up by the Board of Management of St. Catherine's N.S., February 2020

Reviewed at April 2024 BoM meeting.

*Gerard Stack*  
Chairperson, Board of Management

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