

**Timahoe NS, Timahoe, Co. Laois.**

**057 8627051**

Critical Incident

Policy

**Critical incident Management Response and After Care Guidelines**

Critical Incident Management Guidelines are essential in school life today. This document has been compiled to offer a summary guide to our approach, should the need arise. This guide has been compiled with reference to Responding to Critical Incidents; Guidelines for Schools and Responding to Critical Incidents; Resource Material for Schools (Published by The Dept of Education & Skills (DES) and National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), 2007).

A critical incident is defined as an incident or sequence of events which overwhelm the normal coping mechanism of the school (NEPS).

*Examples of such critical incidents within the school community are:*

**Level 3**

* The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, permanent injury, terminal illness, murder or suicide
* Serious injury or death of a person on the school premises
* A physical assault on staff member (s) or student(s) on the school premises
* Kidnap

**Level 2**

* Criminal incident occurring during school time
* Road traffic accident/Bus crash with no casualties
* Onset of serious illnesses causing distress or trauma
* Serious damages to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.

**Level 1**

* Intrusion into the school or criminal incident outside the school hours
* An accident/tragedy in the wider community

The Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) at Scoil Mhuire Fatima consists of the following members.

* The Principal.
* Deputy Principal.
* Chaplain (If required).
* Relevant others i.e. Teachers, Special Needs Assistants, Secretary, Caretaker.

In the case of a critical incident occurring the role of the Principal/Deputy Principal is normally one of the leadership, family liaison and/or communication in the. The role of the Chaplain and relevant others would be in relation to counselling.

**Leadership/Family Liaison/ Communication**

When a critical incident occurs it would be expected that the Principal/Deputy Principal would take actions which may include the following (depending on circumstances).

* Confirm what has occurred and get accurate information in relation to the incident. Only if the tragedy is confirmed as a suicide by the family can it be relayed as such.
* Express sympathy to the family and assure the family of the schools support throughout the process.
* Ensure that the family knows who is the contact person with the school (normally a member of the CIM Team)
* Organise a meeting of the CIM Team.
* Make contact with Gardaí if necessary.
* Make contact with the NEPS Psychologist for advice.
* Assess the necessity of the NEPS Psychologist to attend the school.
* Set up a crisis team room in the school to which queries, phone calls and information would be forwarded. Devise a process for dealing with telephone enquiries from anxious parents.
* Plan a staff meeting if required.
* Prepare an announcement for staff and pupils.
* Prepare a statement and distribute *Procedures for breaking bad news* to class teachers.
* Contact parents if some pupils request to go home.
* Have written and /or oral response to enquiries prepared.
* Notify the Board of Management.
* Prepare a statement for the media if required.
* Discourage any pupil or staff from dealing with the media.

**Intervention responsibilities for the Principal**

* Outline services available to the affected pupils during the first couple of hours on hearing of the incident.
* Assist class teacher of the class affected in breaking the news.
* Have guidelines for staff in dealing with pupils in distress i.e. information on grief responses, identifying those in need of counselling and support and possible parental support.
* Take time with the most affected pupils in crisis response room.
* Organise a class prayer service once all pupils have been notified.
* Encourage those who feel able to return to class.
* Meet and support any distressed parents or staff.

**The CIM Team: Step by step approach, in the event of a death of a member of the school community**

* The Principal, having confirmed the death, makes contact with the family.
* The CIM Team meet to plan strategy, keeping in mind the guidelines already outlined.
* Key tasks are distributed.
* Have all guidelines for teachers ready.
* Have written and oral statements ready for all communications within the school and possible media enquiries.
* Meet staff first thing in the morning, take note of any absences to ensure that all staff members are aware of what has happened.
* CIM Team outline to staff the plan for the day and the support available.
* Class teachers break news to classes, with assistance from the Chaplain if appropriate.
* Plan another staff meeting if necessary to update staff and or make decisions.
* Clarify funeral arrangements with staff when known.

**Common reactions on hearing traumatic news**

Individuals react differently on hearing traumatic news. Listed below are possible emotional and physical responses to hearing traumatic news:  
shock, fear, guilt, grief, tears, panic, denial, anxiety, depression, anger, emotional outburst, being overwhelmed, nausea, fainting, pain, dizziness, weakness, palpitations and breathing difficulties.

**In the emotional/ behavioural area there may be:**Confusion, uncertainty, blame, poor concentration, disorientation, restlessness, signs of withdrawal, or a feeling of being let down.

In response to these reactions the crisis response team and / or teacher should show genuine care and concern to the individual affected. Be available through listening and allow pupils to express their feelings and encourage as much talk as possible. Allow the pupil to talk about the pupil/teacher they have lost and reassure them that they as an individual class group have done everything possible. A list of local counselling services outside of school will be available to parents where necessary, as sometimes a child may need further or longer periods of counselling. ‘Rainbows Ireland’ supports children bereaved or separated and runs local groups.

**Day 2**Pupils who are not coping should be referred to the Principal on an individual basis. It is important that the school function as normally as possible on the second day following a critical incident.

**Day 3**The CIM Team need to meet to work through the critical incident strategy and the after care for the pupils and the school. This may involve the class teacher, resource teacher etc. School records should be updated.

**Procedures for Breaking News**

From a teacher’s perspective it is very difficult to pass on bad news as a result of a critical incident. The following guidelines are suggested in such an event.

* The class of the pupil/teacher who has died should be the first to be told.  
   Other classes to be told by their class teacher.  
  Not every class is going to be traumatised following the bad news but a possible way for a teacher to break the news would be to tell the class that they have sad news and it is difficult for them to do this.
* The teacher should let the class know the name of the person the news is about. Let the class know the facts as the teacher knows them and encourage questions.
* The teacher should let the class know of common reactions to such tragic news, the most common reaction being shock.
* A teacher can expect tears and outbursts but should not allow a pupil to leave the classroom alone.
* Pupils must be supervised within the school building while in a distressed state. Let them know that they will receive support within the school.
* Allow the class to mingle and talk.  The teacher can explain to the class how they can support one another. The teacher may also try to be attentive to identifying those who are not coping well with the news.
* It may be essential to remind pupils more than once that there is help available, as limited information is assimilated initially.
* Some pupils will need to stay with the CIM Team for the morning. Those who go to class may not be able to concentrate on the work for that class therefore teachers should be sensitive to this.

**Contacting staff if tragedy or incident occurs over a weekend or over holidays.**If a tragedy occurs over a weekend or during holiday time and the death is one of a teaching colleague, a system of informing staff needs to be in place.  Normally the Principal and Deputy Principal will make contact with the staff by phone.

If it is the death of a pupil, the CIM Team needs to be informed immediately while other staff can be informed later. Nevertheless whoever hears the news first needs to inform the Principal or Deputy Principal.

**In the event of a death or deaths of parents/pupils/retired teachers under normal circumstances, the normal response may be as follows:**

Consult the family on the school’s involvement in the funeral, remembering that the family wishes must be respected.  
• Make decisions on those who should attend the funeral, where relevant.  
• Communication of such a death to the school as a whole.  
• Discuss the possibility of the school being closed on the day of funeral which would involve notification to the Department of Education & Science, parents, the cancellation of organised activities e.g. matches, tour buses and the  
informing of possible visitors to the school on that day of closure.  
Organise flowers and Mass cards.

Book of condolence for pupils and staff.  
A school memorial service for pupils and staff.

**The aftercare as a result of a critical incident**It is important after a critical incident that with time a de-briefing occurs for pupils and staff. In particular, staff should be kept informed of the on-going counselling and support which people are receiving within the school. Close attention and observation of pupils who are deeply affected by such incidents must be observed. De-briefing can prevent the onset of post-traumatic stress disorder, (the symptoms of which may include flashbacks or nightmares, intense stress, emotional numbing, lack of sleep, irritability, anger, poor concentration).  This is why critical incident stress de-briefing is an important part of our approach.

**Memorials and Remembrances**

**The following suggestions may be used in conjunction with our Critical Incident Plan by the CIM Team.**  
• A book of Condolence, A Sacred Space, A lighted Candle  
• A scrapbook or pictorial record  
• The use of a photograph of the individual(s), with a candle  
• A Memorial Award  
• A Memorial Service  
• The anniversary to be remembered.

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**Staff:**In the event of any critical incident within the school the actions above attempt to serve pupils and staff alike in their dealing with such a tragedy.  Nevertheless each individual member of staff will deal with such an incident in their own way. It may be useful for staff to be aware of their own reactions when it comes to such a psychological trauma. Staff should be helped to understand their own emotional reactions, to plan for balance in the after event of such an incident and to create a support system within the school. Staff be aware of the availability of personal assistance through the Employee Assistance Scheme (DES). This can be accessed, at no cost, by email: [eas@vhics.ie](mailto:eas@vhics.ie) or on 1800 411 057.

Copies of relevant resources are included in Responding to Critical Incidents (Resource Materials for Schools).We endeavour to purchase relevant new resources/materials as they become available.

**Sample Media Statement**

*Can be modified to suit and reflect the incident.*

It is with profound sadness that the B.O.M , Principal, staff and students of Scoil Mhuire Fatima, Primary School have learned of the …………………….

Our sincere sympathy is extended to the family of……….

On hearing the tragic news the school Critical Incident Management Team was put into immediate operation. The Critical Incident Management team convened a meeting to ensure that pupils affected by this……….. are given all the help they need to cope at this time.

The school is offering counselling and support for pupils and parents affected by this ………

Prayer services have been held with each class in co-operation with the Chaplain. At this time our prayers and support are with everyone affected by this……

**Dealing with the Media**

Some events draw a great deal of media attention. Media interest can add to the complexity of the situation and it is therefore very important to agree a procedure for dealing with the media at an early stage in the intervention.

**Some points to remember if you are asked to give a live interview**

* Consider assigning the task to someone skilled or familiar with dealing with the media.
* Take the time to prepare the interview by asking in advance for an outline of the questions you will be asked.
* Remember that everything you say is on record and therefore keep it simple, factual and brief.
* Decline it if you feel it inappropriate or you are not ready for it.
* Avoid sweeping statements and generalizations.
* Avoid being drawn into speculation.
* Seek guidance from ASTI, INTO, TUI or other body for advice and guidance
* Do not answer questions you do not know the answer to.
* Do not use “No comment”.
* Do not read the statement to the camera.
* Remember to control access of the media to students and staff.
* Consider letting the media inside the school and if yes, set aside a room.
* Brief staff and all members of staff and advise them on how to deal with the media and insist that all queries should be referred to the Principal.

**Guidelines for the school**

The Principal should either elect to be media spokesperson or delegate the task to another staff member.

Primary Concern at this time is to look after the school community and to protect the privacy of the people most affected. Provision of interviews or material for the media should not distract the school from these tasks.

It is important to remember that the media can assist in dispelling rumour, providing information and giving the message to parents and children that the school is coping well with events. On the other hand, it can also add to the pain be sensationalising the story.

* A press statement should be prepared. It should be brief and carefully considered. It is especially important that information reported be accurate.
* Sweeping statements or generalisations should be avoided. The privacy of the persons/family concerned should be respected. It can be read out, or given to the media by fax, email or telephone.
* Interviews may also be requested, especially if it is a high profile incident. If school personnel do not wish to be interviewed they should make this decision and request the media to respect this choice.
* Schools may reduce pressure from the press by agreeing to give interviews and by doing so at designated times and in a specific “press” room. This will help to avoid having to deal with a constant stream of requests, a distraction from the school’s role of supporting students.
* Some schools may have access to a manager, trustee or Board of Management member with experience or training in this field and should use this resource if available. Advice may also be available from such bodies as the teacher unions, management bodies, the State Examination Commission (If the incident is during exam time) and, in the case of major incidents, the Press Office of the Department of Education and science.
* Preparation is very important as this is not part of the normal work principles. Statements should be written out but, ideally, not read to the camera. Some questions might be agreed in advance so that responses can be prepared and, if there is time, even rehearsed. At a time of distress, it may be difficult to find the right words so it is generally better to err on the side of brevity and caution.
* Parents should be advised not to allow their children to be interviewed as they do not have the maturity or judgement needed to handle it. It can sometimes lead to regret at a later stage or may increase distress for various parties.

**Do’s and Don’ts in dealing with the media.**

* Do write a press statement
* Do consider contacting the INTO, TUI, ASTI or other relevant body for advice and guidance.
* Do use careful and sensitive language.
* Do keep it short
* Do regard everything as recorded and quotable (generally the media will)
* Do ask whether there will be the possibility of editing the interview
* Do ask in advance for an outline of the questions that you will be asked
* Do avoid sweeping statements and generalisations
* Do avoid being drawn into speculation
* Don’t go into personal details of those involved
* Don’t read the statement to the camera
* Don’t engage in rambling discussions afterwards
* Don’t use ‘NO COMMENT’
* Don’t respond to ‘quotes’ from others
* Don’t answer questions you don’t know the answer to
* Don’t make ‘off the record’ comments

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

This policy has been made available to school personnel and provided to the Parents’ Association. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the patron if requested.

This policy and its implementation will be reviewed by the Board of Management once in every school year. Written notification that the review has been completed will be made available to school personnel, published on the school website and provided to the Parents’ Association. A record of the review and its outcome will be made available, if requested, to the patron and the Department.

Signed:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Signed:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(Chairperson of Board of Management) (Principal)

Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date of next review:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Important Contact Numbers**

GARDAI 057 8674100

AMBULANCE 999

HOSPITAL   057 8621364

FIRE BRIGADE 999

D.E.S. 0906442700

N.E.P.S PSYCHOLOGIST 09165154/9143272

**Support Contact Numbers**

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| --- | --- |
| Laois Bereavement Support | 057-8660984 |
| Suicide Bereavement Support | 086 8157320 |
| The Snowdrop Therapy Centre\* | 087 9647748 |
| Community Mental Health | 057 8622925 |

Console  1800 201 890

RAINBOWS 01 4734175

BARNARDOS 01450355

THE SAMARITANS 1850609090

CHILDLINE 1800666666

PARENTLINE 1890927277

AWARE 016766166

1890303302