



Critical Incident Policy

St Colmcille's NS

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Response and after Care Policy.

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A Critical Incident Management Policy is essential in school life today. One could define a critical incident as an accident or incident where a traumatic death occurs or is perceived in the school context. Examples of such critical incidents are:

- Suicide
- Child killed while crossing the road
- Bus crash on a school trip with multiple injuries and deaths
- Disappearance of a member of the school community
- Death of a member of the School Staff, i.e. Teacher, SNA, Caretaker, Secretary
- A Child Protection issue.
- Murder
- Abduction

The Critical incident management team will consist of the following:

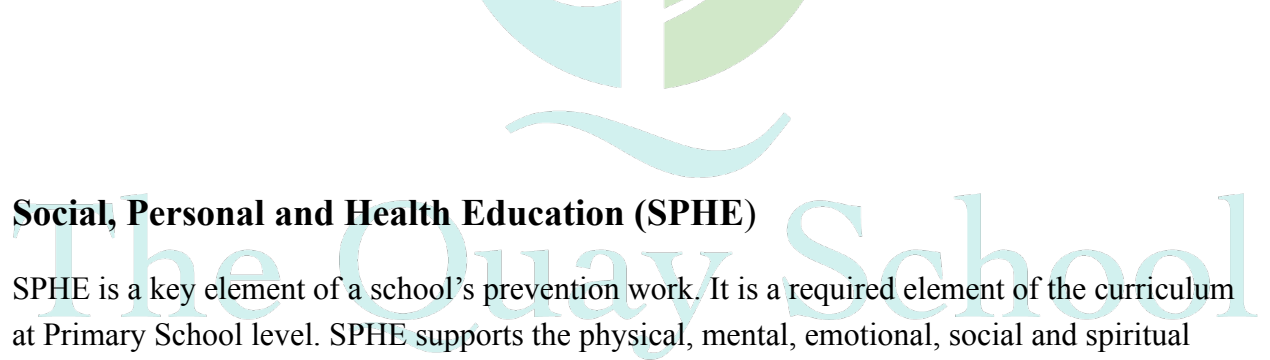
- a) The Principal
- b) Deputy Principal
- c) Chaplain (if required)
- d) Chairperson of the Board of Management
- e) Relevant others i.e. Teacher, Special Needs Assistants, Secretary, Caretaker,

The role of Principal/Deputy Principal is normally one of leadership, family liaison and/or communication. The role of the Chaplain and relevant others would be in relation to counselling and chaplaincy.

Prevention

Schools can attend to prevention by having systems in place which help to promote emotional health and well-being and which build resilience to both staff and students, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events.

One of the key means available to schools in their work for supporting healthy development for all students is Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).



Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

SPHE is a key element of a school's prevention work. It is a required element of the curriculum at Primary School level. SPHE supports the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development and well-being of all members of the school community.

Leadership/Family Liaison/Communication

When a critical incident occurs, it would be expected that the Principal /Deputy Principal would take on the following intervention responsibilities:

Day 1.

- Confirm that loss of life has occurred and get accurate information in relation to the incident.
- Express sympathy to the family and assures the family of the school's support throughout the process.
- Ensure that the family knows the contact person within the school. This may be anybody on the critical incident management team.
- Consult the family on the school's involvement in the funeral, remembering that the family wishes must be respected.
- Organise the critical incident management team to meet.
- Prepare an announcement for staff and pupils.
- Plan a staff meeting if required
- Prepare a statement and distribute procedures to class teachers in breaking the News
- Devise a process for dealing with telephone enquiries from anxious parents
- Have written and /or oral response to enquiries prepared
- Notify the Board of Management
- Prepare a statement for the media and enquiring phone calls from the media
- Discourage any pupil or staff from dealing with the media
- Make decisions on those who should attend funeral and how where relevant

- Discuss the possibility of the school being closed on 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.

Intervention responsibilities for the Chaplain:

- a) Set up a crisis team room in the school where queries, phone calls and information would be forwarded to.
- b) Outline services available to the affected pupils during the first couple of hours on hearing of the incident.
- c) Assist class teacher of the class affected in breaking the news
- d) Have guidelines for staff in dealing with pupils in distress i.e. information on grief responses, identifying those in need of counseling and support and possible parental support.
- e) Take time with the most affected pupils in crisis response room
- f) Assess the necessity of the NEPS Psychologist to attend school
- g) Organise class prayer service for during the day once all pupils have been notified
- h) Contact parents if some pupils request to go home
- i) Encourage those, who feel able, to return to class
- j) Meet and support any distressed parents or staff
- k) Liaise with the local clergy regarding funeral

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

- a) Communication of such a death to the school as a whole
- b) The attendance at funeral
- c) The flowers
- d) Cards
- e) Book of condolence for pupils and staff
- f) A school memorial service for pupils and staff

This is a sample media statement which can be modified to suit and reflect the incident:

It is with profound sadness that the B.O.M., Principal staff and students of have learned of the death of... 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 loss are cared for adequately. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this loss are given all the help they need to cope at this time.

The school is offering counseling and support for pupils and parents affected by this tragedy. Prayer services have been held with each class in co-operation with the School Chaplain. Pupils will attend and participate in the funeral service in consultation with the wishes of the family.



At this sad time our prayers and support are with everyone affected by this tragedy.

The critical incident management team: step by step approach.

- a) The Principal, having confirmed the death, will contact the family.
- b) The critical incident management team meets to plan strategy keeping in mind the guidelines already outlined.
- c) Key tasks are distributed
- d) Have all guidelines for the teachers ready
- e) Have written and oral statements ready for all communication within the school and possible media enquiries.
- f) Have a notice at entrances to the school for staff to report to the staff room at 8.40am
- g) Meet staff; note any absences or late arrivals to ensure that all staff hears the news,
- h) The critical incident management team outlines to staff the plan for the day and the support available.
- i) Class teachers break news to classes
- j) Plan another staff meeting (if necessary) to update staff and/or make decisions.
- k) Clarify funeral arrangements with staff when known
- l) The critical incident management team meets to plan procedures for school involvement in the removal and the funeral.

Guidelines on breaking bad 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 suggestions in such an event:

- a) Only if the tragedy is confirmed as a suicide by the family can it be relayed as such
 - b) The class of the pupil who has died should be the first to be told.
 - c) Other classes to be told by their class teacher
 - d) 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 must 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 time 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, as little information is assimilated once in shock.

Some pupils will need to stay with the critical incident management team for the morning. Those who go to class may not be able to concentrate on the work of that class therefore teachers should be sensitive to this.

We value the support and guidance of our parents when appropriate.



Common reactions after 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 outbursts, Being overwhelmed, Nausea, Fainting, Pain, Dizziness, Weakness, palpitations and breathing difficulties.

In the mental and behavioural area there may be the following reactions:

- Confusion, blame, poor concentration, disorientation, being withdrawn, restlessness, being let down and uncertainty.

In response to these reactions the critical incident management team and/or teacher may 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 they have lost and reassure them that they as an individual class group have done everything possible. A list of local counseling services outside of school will be available to parents where necessary, as sometimes a child may need further or longer periods of counseling. Rainbows Ireland' supports children bereaved or separated and run local groups.

Day 2: Pupils who are not coping should be referred to the Principal or on an individual basis. It is important that the school return to normal on the second day.

Day 3: The critical incident management team will need to meet to plan the critical incident strategy and the after care for the pupils and the school following the funeral which may involve the class teacher, etc. Furthermore, all school records should be updated immediately.

Contacting staff if tragedy or incident occurs over a weekend or over holidays.

1. If a tragedy occurs over a weekend or during holiday time and the death is a teaching colleague, a system of informing staff needs to be in place. Mobile phone (texts) and e-mails are a possible method.
2. If it is the death of a pupil the crisis team needs to be informed immediately while other staff can be informed later. Nevertheless, whoever hears the news first will need to inform the Principal or Deputy Principal. A list of mobile numbers and e-mail addresses will be attached to this Critical Incident Policy.

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 may be briefed on the on-going counseling 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. In the case of de-briefing it can prevent the onset of post traumatic stress disorder, in which symptoms may be flashbacks or nightmares, intense stress, emotional numbing, lack of sleep, irritability, anger, poor concentration and continually being on edge. This is why critical incident stress debriefing is an important part of our policy.



Memorials and Remembrances

Suggested below are items, which may prove useful in a critical incident plan in:

- a) A Book of Condolence, A Sacred Space, A lighted Candle
 - b) A scrapbook or pictorial record
 - c) The use of a photograph of the individual lost with a candle
 - d) A Memorial Award
 - e) A Memorial Service
 - f) The anniversary to be remembered.
- 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 to such a psychological trauma. A staff member 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.
 - The Health, Safety and Welfare of all the School Community is paramount to the B.O.M
 - This Policy will be reviewed on a yearly basis.
 - **Related Policies:** Fire Drill, Anti-Bullying Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Child Protection Policy, Procedures for Out-Of-School Activities/ school tours, Covid 19 Policy Statement Risk Assessment and Response Plan.

Resources:

- 1) Responding to Critical Incidents- Guidelines for schools
- 2) Responding to Critical Incidents- Resource Materials for Schools (DES/ NEPS Publication)
- 3) When tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools (INTO publication)- can be downloaded from website.
- 4) Rainbows Booklet: “from hurt, through healing to hope”
- 5) National Council for Special Education – <http://ncse.ie/online-resources>
- 6) National Education Psychological Services (NEPS)
- 7) Spectrum Life – Employee Assistance

Critical Incident Management Team

Role	Name
Team Leader Critical Incident Management Team	Principal – Kevin Munnelly Deputy Principal – Ann Lally PP: Fr. John Kenny Chairperson of Board of Management – Seamus Moran
Garda Liaison	Westport Garda Station
Community Liaison Garda	Shane Nallen
Staff Liaison	Deputy Principal – Ann Lally
Student Liaison	Class teachers & Fr. John Kenny
Parent Liaison	Principal – Kevin Munnelly
Community Liaison	School Secretary - Margaret Connolly
Media Liaison	Chairperson of Board of Management – Seamus Moran
Administrator	School Secretary - Margaret Connolly

Short Term Actions – Day 1

Task	Name
Gather accurate information	Principal
Who, What, Where, When	Principal
Convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly	Principal
Contact external agencies	Margaret
Arrange supervision for students	All staff/ SET team
Hold staff meeting	All staff
Agree schedule for the day	Principal/ Deputy Principal
Inform students - (Close Friends and students with learning difficulties may need to be told separately)	Class teachers
Compile a list of vulnerable students	All Staff
Contact/ Visit the bereaved family	Principal
Prepare and agree media statement and deal with media	Chairperson
Inform parents	Principal
Hold end of day staff briefing	All Staff

Medium Term Actions (Day 2 and following days)



Task	Name
Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day 1	Team Leader
Meet external agencies	Principal/ Chairperson
Meet whole staff	Principal/Deputy Principal
Arrange support for students, staff, parents	Principal/ Chairperson
Visit the Injured	Principal
Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements	Principal
Agree attendance and participation at the funeral service	All staff
Make decisions about school closure	Board of Management

Follow Up – Beyond 72 hours



Task	Name
Monitor Students for signs of continuing stress	Class Teachers
Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Principal
Plan for return of bereaved students	All Staff
Plan for giving of 'memory box' to bereaved family	All staff
Decide on memorials and anniversaries	Board of Management/ Staff, parents and students
Review Response to incident and amend plan	Staff/ B.O.M

- *Reviewed September 2023*
- *Reviewed September 2024*