



# St Francis National School

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## Critical Incident Policy

*In reading this policy, it should be noted that the term "Parent(s)" also includes Guardians and should be interpreted as such.*

### Introduction:

We aim to protect the well-being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and inclusive environment as outlined in our school Ethos and Mission statement.

The Board of Management through the principal, the staff and the Parent Association has drawn up a critical incident management plan.

### 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 (Foot & Mouth)
- Criminal incidents (e.g. Dunblane shooting, Shooting at first communion in Ballymun.)
- Major accidents, serious injury (e.g. 'Navan bus crash')
- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster (e.g. school ceiling collapsing in Cork)
- Disappearance of student from home or school (e.g. Middleton incident in Cork)
- Unauthorised removal of a student(s) from school or home.
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies e.g. 9/11, tsunami, Ukraine

## **Critical Incidents Management Team:**

Team Leader: Principal - Oreena Lawless

Garda Liaison: Principal - Oreena Lawless

Media Liaison: Principal - Oreena Lawless

Communication Role: (staff liaison, student liaison): Deputy Principal - Elaine O'Rourke

Counselling Role: National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

Chaplaincy Role: Chairperson Board of Management – Father Pádraig Keenan

Family Liaison Role: Principal/Helena Reynolds

Community Liaison/Parent Association Rep

B.O.M. Rep: Robert Cosgrove

## **Critical incident rooms**

In the event of a critical incident,

- *Staff room* will be the main room used to meet the staff
- *Hall* for meetings with students
- *Principal office* for parents
- *Hall* for media
- *Multi-purpose Room (upstairs)* for individual sessions with students
- *Learning Support Rooms* for other visitors

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **1. Leadership Role:**

#### Intervention

- 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, outline the routine for the day
- Express sympathy to those personally affected
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

#### Postvention

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review Plan

### **2. Communication Role:**

#### Intervention

- 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
- Impress on stakeholders the importance of the **embargo on the use of social media**

#### Postvention

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

### **3. Student Liaison/ Counselling Role:**

#### Intervention

- 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
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provide information
- Provide counselling

#### Postvention

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer as appropriate
- Review and evaluate Plan

### **4. Chaplaincy Role:**

#### Intervention

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

#### Postvention

- Provide follow-up support to families in conjunction with school
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

### **4. Family Liaison Role:**

#### Intervention

- Coordinate contact with families (following first contact by principal)
- Consult with those personally affected around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident

#### Postvention

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident

- Involve as appropriate those personally affected in school liturgies/memorial services
- Offer to link those personally affected with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan

## **ACTION PLAN**

### **Short Term Actions (Day 1)**

- Immediate contact with family/families
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff

### **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
  1. Emergency services
  2. Medical services
  3. HSE Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
  4. NEPS
  5. BoM
  6. DE/Schools Inspector
- 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 Student Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- The Chaplain/Principal will liaise with those personally affected, to extend sympathy and clarify their wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service

- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Student Liaison person + Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

### **Medium-Term Actions (24-72 Hours)**

- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staff's 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/students/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, 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 students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
  - Family Liaison person, class teacher, principal to visit home/hospital a appropriate.
  - 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 students for signs of continuing distress. Constant communication with those personally affected is essential.

If, over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, they may need assistance from the Health Board.

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
- Ensure that new staff members 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 their new school

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

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/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 for the deceased person's possessions. What are the family's wishes?
- Update and amend school records

**Communication**

This policy will be available in the Plean Scoile and on the school website.

**Responsibility for Review:**

All members of staff, Parent Association, BoM.

**Timeframe for Review:**

This policy will be reviewed every three years or as required to meet the needs of the school.

**Next review:** December 2027

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**Critical Incident Policy**

Ratified by the Board of Management on 23/4/2024 (Date)

Signed: *Enda Keene* (Chairperson, Board of Management)