



St. Columba's N.S.,

Tullow,
Co. Carlow,
R93 R266.

Roll Number: 13607M
Telephone: 059-9151873

Email: stcolumbasnstullow@eircom.net

Website: stcolumbasnstullow.com

Critical Incident Policy

St. Columba's N.S. aims to protect the wellbeing of its students by providing a safe and nurturing environment. St. Columba's N.S. has taken a number of measures to create a supportive and caring ethos in the school. The school has also formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed to ensure both staff and student psychological and physical safety at all times.

What is a Critical Incident?

St. Columba's N.S. recognised a critical incident to be "an incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school" (Responding to Critical Incidents in Schools – National Educational Psychological Services NEPS).

Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils, staff, the school or the community in which they function. Types of incidents include:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- An intrusion into the school.
- An accident / tragedy in the wider / school community.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- Anaphylactic shock.
- Or others as appropriate.

Note:

- Students and staff have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in the incident and need to be sensitive to the consequences of any public statement.
- **The term "suicide" will not be used without the consent of the family involved or until it has been established categorically that the person's death was a result of suicide. The phrases "tragic death" or "sudden death" may be used instead.**

Aim

The key of managing critical incidents is planning. Schools that have developed a Critical Incident Management Plan report being able to cope more effectively in the aftermath of an incident. Having a plan enables staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. This may also ensure that normality returns as soon as possible and that the effects on the students and staff are limited.

Development and Communication of a Critical Incident Management Plan

In devising this plan, staff, parents and the Board of Management were consulted and the draft plan was made available and presented to these bodies.



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Copies of the Critical Incident Management Plan are to be instantly accessible to all personnel and each member of the Critical Incident Team has a personal copy. Copies of the plan will be kept in the filing cabinet, in the office. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan.

Creation of a coping, supporting and caring ethos in the school

We have put in place a system to lessen the probability of the occurrence of an incident:

1. Physical Safety in the School

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- School doors are locked during class time, where possible
- School rules are made known and revised with pupils at regular Assembly meetings
- Playground rules are made known and revised with pupils at regular Assembly meetings.

2. Psychological Safety

We endeavour to be proactive in promoting emotional and mental health in order to enable each child to both enjoy life and also manage the normal stresses of life. Accordingly St. Columba's N.S. aims to create an open and encouraging environment in the school where students can talk about their difficulties and seek help for the same.

- S.P.H.E. programmes are included in the curriculum to address issues such as the value of friendship; grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; conflict management; problem solving; help seeking; decision making; alcohol and drug prevention.
- Our school is a "bully-free" zone and we encourage friendship and caring. All incidents of bullying are listened to and investigated as appropriate.
- Our school Code of Behaviour is focused on the promotion and encouragement of good behaviour and the development of a harmonious and happy learning environment for all pupils and staff.
- The school staff monitor the pupils to help identify any vulnerable pupils who may be at risk. Teacher/Principal will talk to the parents, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff are informed of difficulties affecting individual pupils and are aware of and vigilant to their needs.
- Staff are encouraged to participate in professional development.
- Staff have access to books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school child.
- The school has developed links with outside agencies, which may be contacted in the events of an emergency and for onward referral of pupils, e.g. NEPS, HSE, SCP.
- The school has a Child Protection Policy.



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Critical Incident Management Team

A Critical Incident Team **“is a group of individuals from the staff of the school who know the community, the students and each other well enough to make the necessary decisions called for when an incident occurs”** (Mary Schoenfeldt)

- The members of the team are selected on a voluntary basis.
- The members of the team remain the same for at least one full school year
- The members of the team meet when necessary to review and update the roles.

The roles of our Critical Incident Management Team are:

- Team Leader – Principal / Deputy Principal
- Staff Liaison – Principal
- Student Liaison – Principal and Teachers
- Parent Liaison – Principal and Chairperson of Board of Management
- Community Liaison – Principal
- Media Liaison – Principal

As we are a small school, both the Teaching Principal and Deputy Principal will be involved in these roles. In the event of the death of the Principal, her roles will be assumed by the Deputy Principal.

Team Leader – Principal / Deputy Principal

A person in authority who can make decisions during a crisis e.g. school closure, attendance at memorial services, etc.

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting.
- Co-ordinates the tasks of the team.
- Liaises with the Board of Management, Department of Education and Skills, NEOS, the Gardaí, HSE
- Liaises with the bereaved family.
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff.
- Liaises with the Gardaí.
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

Staff Liaison – Principal

A staff member who is known and trusted by the staff.

- Leads meetings to brief staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and outlines the routine for the day.
- Advises staff on the identification of vulnerable students.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
- Provides materials to staff for use in coping with a Critical Incident in the school environment (from Critical Incident folder).
- Advises staff of the availability of the Employee Assistance Service (Carecall) and gives them the contact number.



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Student Liaison – Principal and Teachers

This role is assumed by the class teacher as a trusted and familiar figure to the students. Best practice indicates that pupils need to be with people they know and trust. It is therefore better if school staff provide most of the support for students as they will be around in the longer term and will be in a better position to monitor their pupils over the days and weeks following an incident.

- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students (appropriately)
- Provides material for students (from their critical incident folder)
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room.

Community Liaison – Principal / Secretary

Someone with good contact with agencies and relevant individual in the community.

- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral.
- Is alert to the need to check credentials of individuals offering support.
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies.
- Reminds agency staff to wear name badges.
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.

Parent Liaison – Principal / Parents' Nominee or Deputy Principal

Someone who is known to the parents/guardians of the school. This person should be comfortable speaking before a large group and have the skills to manage the emotional reactions of individual or groups of parents.

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges parent meetings, if held
- May facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Sets up room for meetings with parents
- Provides appropriate materials for parents (from their critical incident folder)

Media Liaison – Principal / Chairperson

Someone with good interpersonal skills who would be comfortable talking to the media by phone or in person. A person who is able to set limits without being offensive.

- In devising the plan, she considers issues which may arise during a Critical Incident e.g. pupils being interviewed, photographers on the premises.
- In the event of a Critical Incident, She liaises with the Communications Section of the DES, INTO, Diocesan Board of Education, etc.
- Will draw up a press statement in consultation with CIMIT and will give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by the school BoM).

Sample Media Parents Statements are available on p.9 of the Resource Materials for Schools and are also in the appendices of this policy.

Administrative Tasks – School Secretary

- Maintenance of up to date lists of contact numbers of:



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- Parents and Guardians – the relevant file will be stored in the School Office and updated each September
- Staff
- Emergency Support Services
- Taking telephone calls, sending letters, texts and copying materials

Record Keeping

In the event of an incident, the team must keep record of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, materials used etc.

Letters to Parents/Guardians

A letter may be circulated to parents / guardians, informing them of the occurrence of a Critical Incident. Sample letters available on p.5 – 8 of Resource Materials for Schools and are also in the appendices of this Policy.

Critical Incident Room

In the event of a Critical Incident, the Hall will be the main room used to meet the staff, students, parents and visitors involved.

Action Plan

Day One Action The Principal / Team Leader (in consultation with NEPS psychologist, where necessary will clarify what type of response is needed and assess what level of intervention is needed.

- **Response Level 1:** the death of a student or staff member who was terminally ill; the death of a parent/sibling; a fire in school not resulting in serious injury; serious damage to school property.
 - For an incident requiring a **Level 1 response** it may be sufficient to talk to the psychologist on the phone. *Locate your Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools* and the accompanying *Resource Material for Schools*. The psychologist will refer to these and talk you through relevant sections. A copy of these has been made available to all schools. It is also available on www.eduction.ie by following the links to NEPS.
- **Response Level 2:** the sudden death of a student or staff member.
- **Response Level 3: incident:** an accident/event involving a number of students; a violent death; an incident with a high media profile or involving a number of schools.



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- In the case of an incident requiring a **Level 2 & Level 3 response:** make contact with NEPS. Depending on the incident at least one psychologist will visit the school.

A summary of the actions necessary on Day One is outlined below. These will be undertaken by the Principal / Team Leader with assistance from other staff, the secretary and the Chairperson of the Board of Management, as appropriate. Normal school and classroom routines will be maintained in so far as possible.

- 1) Gather accurate information: **It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident; otherwise rumours may take over and add to the distress of those involved.**
- 2) Establish the facts: **What** has happened; **when** it happened; **how** it happened; the **number and names of students and staff** involved; are there other schools involved; the extent of the injuries; and the location of those injured.
- 3) Consult the NEPS publications *Responding to Critical Incidents; Guidelines for Schools* and the accompanying *Resource Materials for Schools* (available on www.education.ie)
- 4) Assess the level of NEPS response required – is it a Response Level 1, 2 or 3?
- 5) Contact appropriate agencies (see school's Emergency Contact List)
- 6) Meet with Critical Incident Management team.
- 7) Meet with other agencies, if involved, to agree on roles and procedures.
- 8) Have administration staff photocopy appropriate literature.
- 9) Arrange for the supervision of pupils.
- 10) Address the staff meeting.
- 11) Identify vulnerable pupils.
- 12) Inform pupils.
- 13) Draft a media statement.
- 14) Prepare for a media interview.
- 15) Draft a letter to parents.
- 16) Meet with the CIMT to review the day and arrange an early morning meeting for the following day.
- 17) Meet with staff group.
- 18) Make contact with the affected family / families.

Information pertaining to each of the above is included in Section 4 of the *Responding to Critical Incidents, Guidelines for School* and in the *Resource Material for Schools*. This information may also be found in the appendices of this policy.

Class teachers can use the outline of "A" Classroom Session following news of a Critical Incident" to assist them in the classroom.



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Medium Term Actions

1. Meet with CIMT (and other agencies as necessary). Review Day One List to be completed and assign roles.
2. Staff Meeting.
3. Support / Information Meeting for Parents / Guardians.
4. Meeting individual /Groups of parents meeting NEPS psychologist.
5. Arrange representatives to visit the injured /bereaved family.
6. Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements.
7. Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service.
8. CIMT – Review list of staff and pupils who may be vulnerable and review their progress.
9. Develop a plan for monitoring pupils over the next week, particularly those identified as vulnerable.

Long Term / Follow Up Actions

Monitor pupils for signs of continuing distress.

Liaise with agencies regarding referrals.

Plan for return of bereaved pupils.

Plan for giving of “memory box” to bereaved family.

Decide on memorials and anniversaries.

Review response to incident and amend plan if necessary.

This policy will be reviewed: _____

Ratified by the Board of Management:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

On behalf of the Board of Management