

St. Joseph's National School Moneygall 17003A

Critical Incident Management Policy

INTRODUCTION

The number of critical incidents experienced by schools appears to have increased in recent years. In times of tragedy, young people need support from the adults who know them best. Their teachers have invaluable experience, competence and skill in dealing with children and young people and, in partnership with parents, can be the best people to provide support. The creation of a psychologically and physically safe environment including good SPHE provision, effective pastoral care systems and clear procedures for emergencies contribute to creating a healthy and safe school. St. Joseph's N.S. aims to protect the well being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

RATIONALE

The key to managing critical incidents is forward planning. Having a plan enables staff to react quickly and effectively and to maintain a sense of control. It may also ensure that normality returns as soon as possible and that the effects on students and staff are limited.

As a Catholic school we have the responsibility to ensure that

- Our duty of care to pupils and staff is fulfilled to the best of our ability and in line with statutory responsibilities.
- Our practices reflect our belief in our Catholic community and are inspired by the Gospel values of care, respect, dignity compassion, love and forgiveness.
- A safe and stable environment is provided for pupils and staff.
- The physical and emotional and spiritual well being of the school community is safeguarded.

DEFINITION OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT

‘A crucial incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school.’

Critical incidents may involve pupils, staff, and other members of the school or local community. Examples may include

- A serious accident or tragedy in the school community.
- Serious damage to the school through fire, flooding, vandalism etc.

- A physical assault on a pupil or staff member.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, suicide or illness.
- Intrusion into the school.
- Unexpected evacuation of the school. (e.g. bomb threat)
- Unauthorised removal of pupil from school or home.
- Closure of the school because of infectious diseases.

INTRODUCTION

A critical incident may occur at the school or offsite at another location. In some cases emergency services may have responsibility for dealing with and managing the situation. In others, the incident may be more localized. The Board of Management places no obligation on any staff member to intervene in a critical incident situation if by so doing she/he is placing her/himself or others at risk.

Each situation will require a different response. We are mindful that people respond to a critical incident in different ways according to their attitudes, experiences and beliefs.

At all times the Board of Management and the staff of St. Joseph's National school have a responsibility to protect the good name and privacy of those involved in a critical incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statement.

The aims of the critical incident plan are as follows;

1. To help staff react quickly and effectively in the event of a critical incident and to maintain control of the situation.
2. To restore the school to normality as soon as possible and to limit the affects of the incident on pupils and staff.

The Board of Management has a Health and Safety Statement in place, which is reviewed regularly. Measures are in place to address both the physical and psychological safety of the pupils and staff. Among the measures to ensure physical safety include:

- Health and safety statement for the school.
- Regular fire drills and evacuation procedures.
- Regular checking of fire exits and extinguishers.
- Regular maintenance of school hazards and machinery.
- Corridor doors kept locked during school time.
- Security measure for pupils.
- School yard rules
- School tour policy
- Updated contact details for pupils and staff.
- Updated contact details for parents/guardians.
- Record of pupils who may have specific medical needs.

A number of policies also support the psychological safety of the pupils and staff.

- The child protection policy
- Social, Personal and Health Education Programme.
- The anti-bullying policy.
- The school code of discipline.

External Resources

In the event of a critical incident the school may contact NEPS, Bernardos, the Irish National Teachers Organisation, the Catholic Primary School Management Association and the Employee Assistance Service as necessary to access support. Sr Essae, our diocesan inspector may also be contacted. The chaplain to the school is our local parish priest Fr. Joe Kennedy. The current chairperson of the Board of Management is John Duggan.

Critical Incident Management Team

The team leader will be the Principal, or in her absence, the deputy principal. The members of the team are selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team will have a dedicated critical incident folder containing a copy of the plan and materials particular to their role. All staff members will be given a copy of the plan. There will be an option to co-opt members onto the team if this becomes necessary.

A critical incident box containing keys of the emergency gate, contact phone numbers for parents and emergency contact numbers will be kept in the principal's office. Contact details for parents are also kept on file in the secretary's office. A copy of emergency numbers will be available on office and staffroom notice boards and at the phone in the computer room.

The types of responses needed in the event of an incident are outlined below. However, as each situation is different, tasks may vary from one incident to another. Critical incident management will affect all staff. Even if not directly involved in the team, staff will be making sure that normal schoolwork continues and will be providing support to pupils and colleagues.

Team Leader: Máire Kirwan

- Alerts team members to the incident and convenes a meeting of the team.
- Clarifies the facts surrounding the incident.
- Coordinates and delegates tasks to the team members.
- Liaises with the Board of Management, with the Department of Education and Science and with any outside agencies involved as appropriate.
- Contacts the Trustees in the event of damage to the building
- In cases of bereavement liaises with the family.
- Acts as spokesperson to the media if necessary.
- Ensures provision of ongoing support to pupils and staff.
- Decides with team how news will be communicated to staff, pupils and parents.

- Ensuring telephone lines are available for important incoming and outgoing calls.
- Maintains contact with relevant outside agencies.
- Maintains up to date list of contact numbers for teachers, parents/guardians, external agencies and support services.

Staff Liaison Role: Jane Finnegan

It is very important that staff is kept informed and feel secure in handling questions and comments from both pupils and parents.

- Briefing and advising staff on the facts as known and noting their feelings and concerns/questions.
- Keeping staff updated on developments.
- Noting which staff members are missing at update and passing on the information to them
- Provides resource material for staff from folder.
- Liaising with the school chaplain.
- Arranges supervision cover for class if necessary.
- Maintains a record of staff contact with external agencies.
- Agree with staff how and what information will be given to pupils.
- Maintain links with absent staff as necessary.

Pupil Liaison Role: Damian Egan

- Gathering information from class teacher regarding child's friends, absentees and anyone who may need to be contacted.
- Disseminating information to pupils.
- Gathering information from class teacher/SET regarding the needs of the class or particular students as a result of the incident.
- Organizing an assembly/ prayer service or Mass for the school community to congregate.
- Alerting teachers other than class teachers to vulnerable students as appropriate.
- Keeping records of pupils seen by external agency staff. (e.g. NEPs)

Chaplaincy Role:

- Visiting the classroom and providing support to the class.
- Visiting the staff and providing support.
- Conducting the funeral service if appropriate.
- Conducting a prayer service/mass with the school community.

Family Liaison Role:

- Visiting the bereaved family with the team leader.

- Arranging meeting for parents if necessary.
- Maintaining a record of parents seen by external agencies as appropriate.
- Providing appropriate material for parents from the incident folder.
- Checking different religious beliefs about death and funeral services if relevant.

Staff responsibilities

At all times teaching staff have a responsibility to

- Safeguard welfare of pupils and colleagues.
- Control flow of information by pupils
- Liaise with other staff to ensure safety of pupils.
- Assist in gathering information.
- Supervising their own or colleagues' classes.
- Assisting in identifying and supporting students at risk or in distress.
- Maintaining normal procedures.
- Maintaining confidentiality.

Ancillary staff will also have the responsibility to maintain normal procedures. In addition, the school secretary will ensure that the reception office is staffed at all times and that phone lines are available for important ingoing and outgoing calls.

Contact Details for Pupils and Staff.

Contact details for parents and guardians of all pupils are kept in the office.

The principal and deputy keep contact details for all staff members. A copy is also held on file in the principal's office. Details for parents, guardians and staff are updated annually. Parents are asked to inform the school office should their contact details change. A list of emergency numbers is on display in both the principal's and secretary's offices and on the staff room notice board.

Dealing with the Media

A critical incident may on occasion necessitate dealing with the media. Only the Principal, Deputy Principal or Chairperson of the Board of Management will communicate with the media.

Members of the media must report to the reception office, identify themselves and state their business in the school. Members of the media will not be allowed beyond the reception office except at the invitation of the Principal or Deputy Principal. The media will not be allowed to interview or photograph pupils on the school premises.

As necessary, the principal and deputy principal will prepare a brief media statement to include the following;

- Expressing sympathy for the affected /bereaved family.
- Stating that it is a difficult time for the school community.
- Positive information or comments about the deceased/ injured parties.
- The facts about the situation (following consultation with the families.)
- The term suicide will not be use. Instead the term ‘tragic death’ will be used.
- Outline what is being done to support pupils and staff.

Record Keeping

All team members will keep written records of phone calls made, meetings, and interventions. Records will be compiled and kept on file in the principal’s office. The school secretary will log all phone calls.

Immediate/Short term Actions

Every incident will require a different response. A critical incident may occur on or off site and will consequently require a different response. However the following will serve as a guide to the types of response necessary. Evacuate the building if necessary.

- Inform emergency services.
- Take emergency action to ensure safety at onsite incidents.
- Limit further injury at on site incidents.
- Account for all pupils, personnel and visitors.
- Care for the injured parties.
- Gather accurate information
- Inform Chairperson of Board of Management
- Inform solicitors and insurance company as appropriate.
- Convene a meeting of the CIMT.
- Organize a timetable for the day.
- Inform staff and update on any arrangements as necessary.
- Contact appropriate agencies and organize support.
- Arrange for supervision of pupils.
- Inform pupils and parents.
- Make contact with the affected /bereaved family.
- Respond to the media.
- Report to the health and safety authority if necessary.
- Arrange visit to the affected /bereaved family.
- Identify high-risk students.
- Designate particular areas for parents, media, friends etc. to avoid large groups congregating in particular areas and blocking entrances etc.

Medium Term Actions (24-72 hours)

- Meeting of the CIMT to decide on the following
- Arrangements for support for staff /pupils.
- Decide on mechanism for getting feedback from teachers on vulnerable pupils.
- If relevant plan visits to the injured.
- School closure if appropriate following agreement from the Board of Management.
- If relevant, prepare staff/students for attending funeral.
- If appropriate and if agreed by the affected family, involve the pupils or staff in funeral.
- Maintain contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Plan for the reintegration of pupils and staff e.g. those injured, those who were directly affected, absentees etc.
- Hold a prayer service for the pupils and staff.
- Arrange for pupil and staff response to those affected. e.g. cards, flowers etc.
- Maintain the normal timetables/school day to make sure pupils are unsettled as little as possible.
- Organize support for staff
- Provide information to families on the kind of support available to them and their children.

Long Term Actions

- Monitor pupils for signs of anxiety.
- Liaise with parents re vulnerable pupils.
- Liaise with external agencies regarding referrals.
- Arrange for school memorial service/ anniversary if relevant.
- Review plan in light of incident.
- Update and amend school records.
- Ensure new staff is aware of policy and which pupils/staff affected by an incident.
- Evaluate legal and insurance consequences.
- Written report for the DES and the Board of Management.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND GOOD NAME CONSIDERATIONS

The management and staff of St. Joseph's N.S. have a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind, and will seek to ensure that students do so also. For instance, the term "suicide" will not be used unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, and that the family consents to its use. The phrases "tragic death" or "sudden death" may be used instead.

Similarly, 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.

CRITICAL INCIDENT ROOMS

In the event of a critical incident the following rooms will be used:

- The staff room will be used to meet the staff
- The school hall will be used for meeting pupils and parents
- The staff room will be used for media persons
- The staff room will be used for individual sessions with students
- The staff room will be used for other visitors

Ratification and review

This policy was created, reviewed and approved by the Staff in January 2016.

This policy will be reviewed by the Board of Management once in every school year.

This policy was reviewed and adopted by the Board of Management on [_____]

Signed: _____
Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed: _____
Principal

Date: _____

Date: _____