



Critical Incident Policy

Introduction

In St Mary's N.S, we aim to protect the well-being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times.

St. Mary's N.S. has taken a number of measures to create a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school. The school has also formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of staff and students, both in ordinary time and in the event of a critical incident.

The Board of Management, through the principal and staff, has drawn up a critical incident management plan. They have established a Critical Incident Management Team (C.I.M.T) to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

The C.I.M.T members will follow the protocols set out below. All staff will do likewise. A calm, measured reaction alongside clear communication is vital in the event of any critical incident.

Definition of a Critical Incident.

As per Dept. of Education Guidelines St. Mary's N.S. recognises that *"A critical incident is an incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school"* (Responding to Critical Incidents: Resource Materials for Schools, NEPS, 2008).

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

- A serious accident or tragedy in the wider community.
- Serious damage to the school through fire, flooding, vandalism etc.
- 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.
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- Unauthorised removal of a pupil from school or home.
- A physical assault on a pupil or staff member.

Aim

The aim of the Critical Incident Management Policy and accompanying Plan is to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable us to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff. They should also help ensure that the impact on students and staff will be limited and should enable us to achieve a return to normality as soon as possible.

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.

Physical Safety:

- Health and physical safety statement for the school.
- Regular fire drills and evacuation procedures.
- Regular Classroom audits
- Regular checking of fire exits and extinguishers.
- Four quarterly fire alarm inspections.
- Regular checking of school's AED (automated external defibrillator)
- Exit doors kept closed during school time.
- Yard gates kept closed during yard times.
- Pupils are not released into the care of persons unknown to school staff without checking with a parent/ guardian.
- Code of Behaviour in place and regularly discussed with children.
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Pre-opening supervision in classrooms is in place
- Late arrival and early leaving logged on Aladdin
- Updated contact details for staff, and in case of emergency numbers (in secretary's office)
- Updated contact details for parents/guardians.(saved on Aladdin)
- Record of pupils who have specific medical needs.
- Careplans (PPP's)
- First Aid Boxes maintained in the Junior and Senior Buildings
- Each teacher has a yard supervision bag containing first aid supplies and incident/accident book.

Psychological Safety

- Child Protection Policy:The Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment
- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)is an integral part of the school curriculum and addresses issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, conflict management, substance misuse, help seeking and decision making. The following programmes are taught in our school: Walk Tall,RSE, Weaving Wellbeing, Friends for Life, and Zippy's friends,Be Safe.
- The Stay Safe programme is taught in all classes

- School's Anti-bullying Policy is strictly adhered to and all staff are fully aware of its importance and implementation.
- The school has a "Playground Pal" team of pupils in place to support our younger pupils during yard times.
- Staff have completed 'Introduction to Children First Programme" *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* and the Children First Act 2015.
- Staff are informed of difficulties affecting individual students and are aware of and vigilant in identifying their needs.
- Aladdin alerts in place.
- Staff have access to books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school child.
- The School's Code of Behaviour
- Access to resources and support e.g. Employee Assistance Service, NEPS: 'When Tragedy Strikes', Online Resources etc.
- Links with outside agencies: NEPS, NCSE, Meitheal -Tusla.
- "Ready to Go" packs for staff and pupils.

Critical Incident Management Team

St. Mary's N.S. has set up CIMT in line with best practice and will maintain this team in future. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet once a year to review and update the plan. Each member of the team has a Ready-to-Go pack with relevant materials to be used in the event of an incident.

Critical Incident Management Team

Team Leader: Noelle Lane, Principal/ Shauna McElhinney

Garda Liaison: Noelle Lane, Principal/ Sinéad O'Donovan

Media Liaison/Communication: Shauna McElhinney /Noelle Lane

Pupil Liaison: Cathriona Greally/Tracy Downes

Staff Liaison: Sinéad O'Donovan/ Ava Gilley

Parent/Family Liaison: Shauna McElhinney/Sinéad O'Donovan

Community Liaison: Ava Gilley/ Sinéad O'Donovan

Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Tom McDermott

Administrative Tasks: Brenda McCarthy, Secretary.

N.E.P.S: Marie Hayes

The first named person has the responsibility as defined. The second-named person assists and assume responsibility in the absence of the first named.

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 any other relevant materials. Remote access is also possible and the primary team members will be given administrative access to the Aladdin Schools system which enables contact to be made with all staff and families in the school. All staff members will be given an email copy of the plan. There will be an option to co-opt members onto the team if this becomes necessary. The Aladdin online administration system allows for 24 hour remote access to all staff and pupil contact details from within and outside of the school.

In the event of a critical incident the responsibilities of each role-holder will be as follows:

Roles and Responsibilities of the Team

Team Leader: Noelle Lane/ Shauna McElhinney

- Confirm the event.
- Activate the Critical Incident response team.
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services as appropriate.
- Liaise with the Board of Management, with the Department of Education and Skills and with any outside agencies involved as appropriate.
- Co- ordinate involvement of such agencies.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)
- Organise and co- ordinate communication with staff members not present and with former staff who may be affected by the incident.
- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students.
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events.
- Review and evaluate plan.

Media Liaison:Shauna McElhinney /Noelle Lane

The Principal /Deputy Principal/ Chairperson (with team) 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 used; instead the term 'tragic death' will be used.
- Outline what is being done to support pupils and staff.
- Organise a designated room to address the media promptly.
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls.
- Designate mobile numbers for contact.
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

Members of the media must report to the reception office and identify themselves. They will not be allowed beyond the reception area 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.

Pupil Liaison Cathriona Greally/Tracy Downes

- Gathering information from class teacher/SET regarding the needs of the class or particular students as a result of the incident.
- Gathering information from class-teacher regarding child's friends, absentees and anyone who may need to be contacted.
- Alerting teachers other than class teachers to vulnerable students as appropriate.
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder and 'Ready to Go Pack').
- Disseminate appropriate information to pupils as necessary (See 'Ready to go Pack').
- Organise an assembly/ prayer service or Mass for the school community to congregate.
- Keep records of pupils seen by external agency staff. (e.g. NEPS).
- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students.
- Monitor class most affected.

Staff Liaison Sinéad O Donovan/ Ava Gilley

- 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
- Is alert to vulnerable members of staff and makes contact with them individually if deemed necessary.
- Provides relevant materials to staff from the 'Ready to Go' pack.

Parent/Family Liaison: Shauna McElhinney/Sinéad O Donovan

- Coordinates contact with families (following first contact by Principal).
- Visits the bereaved family with the Team Leader.
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service.
- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident.
- Facilitates 'Questions and Answers' meeting where appropriate
- Meets with individual parents
- Provides materials for parents from the 'Ready to Go' pack

Community Liaison: Ava Gilley/ Sinéad O Donovan

- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral.

- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies.
- Co-ordinates the involvement of these agencies.
- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of Key parents, such as members of the parents' council.
- Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources.

Chaplaincy Role: Fr. Tom McDermott

- Visit home(s), if appropriate.
- Visit Classroom (s) to provide support, if appropriate.
- Lead prayer services if required.
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff.
- Work in partnership with the Critical Incident team.
- Make contact with other local clergy

Administrator: Brenda McCarthy

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of
 - Parents/guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need a response
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and texts
- Photocopies materials as needed
- Maintains records.

Record Keeping:

In the event of an incident each member of the team will document and record actions undertaken in their role, such as meetings held, phone calls made, text alerts sent, letters received or sent etc. The Team Leader will be responsible for forming a coherent record of actions taken by individual members and the team as a whole. The school secretary will be a key support in this.

Confidentiality:

The school has 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. Comments should not be made through any form of social media, by members of the school staff. All staff must bear this in mind and pupils will be reminded of the need for sensitivity and discretion at an age appropriate level.

In the event of a critical incident, the Library will be the main room used to meet the staff, students, parents and visitors involved. In the event of a need to accommodate a second

group, the Computer Room will be used. In the event of needing to cater for a larger group, the school Halla will be used.

Development and communication of this policy and plan

All staff members were consulted and asked for their comments. Our school's final policy and procedures in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff. Each member of the Critical Incident Management Team has a personal copy. All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the Principal.

Action Plan

Short-Term Actions (Day 1)

- Inform emergency services
- Account for all pupils, personnel and visitors.
- Immediate and ongoing contact (as appropriate) with family/families.
- Inform Chairperson of the Board of Management.
- Inform Chaplain.
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident:
 - ❖ What happened, where and when?
 - ❖ What is the extent of the injuries?
 - ❖ How many are involved and what are their names?
 - ❖ Is there a risk of further injury?
 - ❖ What agencies have been contacted already?

- Convene a meeting with the CIMT (08:15)
- Organise a staff meeting (If appropriate at 09:00)
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff.
- Arrange supervision of pupils
- Agree schedule/timetable for the day
- Prepare a brief statement (Team).
- Media briefing if appropriate (see above).
- Inform pupils-(close friends and students with additional needs may need to be told separately)
- Inform Parents/Guardians
- Protect the family's privacy.
- Hold end of day staff briefing

Contact appropriate agencies

1. *Emergency services (Gardaí, Fire Service, Ambulance)*
2. *Medical Services*
3. *Parish Office*

4. *H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services*
5. *NEPS*
6. *BOM*
7. *DES/Schools Inspector.*
8. *CareCall*
9. *INTO*
10. *Allianz Insurance*

- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service.
 1. *The Chaplain/ Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service.*
 2. *Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Principal/Deputy Principal/Class teacher)*
 3. *Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.*

Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson. (Principal)
- Prepare a brief statement. (Team)
- Protect the individual's/family's privacy.

Medium Term Actions (24-72 Hours)

- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Preparation of students/staff attending the funeral.(To be decided in accordance with family's wishes and school management decisions.)
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by the bereaved family.
- Facilitation of students/staff's responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team.
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff as necessary.
- Decide on mechanisms for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
- Have a review of the Critical Incident Management Team meeting.
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Hold support/information meetings for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened and give information on further support if required.
- There will be no compulsion on any teacher to participate in support meetings.
- Arrange individual or group debriefings/support meetings in consultation with outside agencies (with parental permission).
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc).
- Pupil Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured if and as appropriate.
- School closure (if appropriate).Request a decision on this from school management.
- Plan a school memorial service (if appropriate)
- Care for the deceased person's possessions. What are the family's wishes?

Long-Term Actions

- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress.
- Communication with family is essential.
- Liaise with external agencies regarding referrals.
- Plan for return of bereaved pupil/s
- Arrange for school memorial service/anniversary if relevant.
- Awareness by staff around significant days like birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day.
- Ensure new staff is aware of policy and which pupils/staff were affected by an incident.
- Plan for giving of "Memory Box" to bereaved family (if appropriate)
- 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?
- Consult with NEPS Psychologist as appropriate.
- 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 the new school.
- Update and amend school records:

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 etc.

Ratification and Review

This policy was reviewed in November 2022 and will be reviewed annually by the Critical Incident Team and brought to the Board of Management.

Ratified by the Board of Management of St. Mary's National School, Cobh

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Chairperson of Board of Management