

CRITICAL INCIDENT PLAN 2023 - 2024



ST CAIMIN'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL

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Introduction

This plan sets out procedures to be applied in the event of a critical incident. This plan has special regard to the emotional wellbeing of the school community.

Scope

This plan applies to all of our school community, irrespective of where or when such a critical incident may occur.

A critical incident occurs when the school experiences a tragic event. Such events may include:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- An accident involving pupils or staff on or off the school premises.
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or intrusion into the school.
- Real or threatened damage to the school premises or injury to members of the school community through fire, flood, storm, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community.

Relationship to Mission Statement

This plan derives from the Mission Statement. It is directly linked to the aspiration in that statement that all in the school should feel cared for and safe.

Rationale

This plan aims to build awareness among the school staff as to the potential impact disasters and critical incidents can have on the school community. It outlines the preparation that the school should undertake in order to ensure an effective response to crisis situations. It emphasizes the importance of having effective emergency plans in place before an incident occurs and it provides a framework for dealing with it.

Objectives

The Critical Incident plan will:

- allow St Caimin's School to cope more effectively in the event of an incident
- enable staff to react quickly and effectively
- enable staff to maintain a sense of control.
- ensure that normality returns as soon as possible
- ensure that the effects on students and staff are limited
- ensure effective communication

Related Policies and Documents

This plan may be read in conjunction with the following:

- Substance Use Policy
- Anti- bullying policy
- Safety Statement
- Code of Behaviour for Students
- Internet Acceptable Usage Policy for Pupils and staff

Preparation

The school maintains a coping, supportive and caring ethos through:

- Nurturing a physically and psychologically safe environment through the development of areas such as an anti-bullying policy, peer support programmes, fire drills, equipment and buildings checks.
- Inclusive SPHE programmes covering such areas as communication skills, self esteem, decision-making, bereavement, stress management, and coping skills.
- Maintaining pastoral care structures and reviewing their effectiveness.
- Providing information for staff to deal with critical incidents.
- Maintaining links with outside agencies.

Critical Incident Team

This team will meet annually to update and review the plan and determine the duties of each team member in the event of a critical incident. Any member of the team may bring an incident to the attention of the principal. The Principal plays a key role, having overall responsibility for many of the tasks. Certain **administrative tasks** are carried out on an ongoing basis so that communication is speedy and effective in the event of a critical incident.

Key administrative tasks

Maintain an up-to-date list of contact numbers in respect of the following:

- pupils, parents, guardians
- staff
- emergency support services

Teachers taking pupils on outings involving an overnight stay must:

- bring a proper first aid kit
- create the following phone contact list:
 - principal
 - deputy principal
 - parent/guardian home and mobile
 - travel agent, if appropriate
 - consular offices or embassy, where appropriate
 - transport companies

- leave a copy of the following with the principal and deputy principal prior to travelling:
 - list of those travelling including all teachers and their contact details
 - telephone contact list of the parent/guardians of those pupils travelling
 - copy of itinerary
 - name and telephone number of accommodations
 - mobile phone number of tour leader

The teacher bringing students on a day trip/match in Ireland must:

- bring a proper first aid kit
- leave a list of those travelling on the notice board in the staffroom and at reception
- ensure the following items are left at the office:
 - list of those travelling
 - list of all teachers and their contact details
 - copy of itinerary
 - name and address of the company providing transport

Electronic Communication

Electronic communication allows for the immediate delivery of accurate information to parents, teachers and other stakeholders. Further, it counteracts false or misleading information delivered on social media sites or by word of mouth.

When the school network is operational:

- A text message with a hyperlink will direct parents to the school's website.*
- A member of the critical incident team will put an agreed statement of facts on the homepage.
- The two steps referred to above will be repeated as the need arises.

If the school's network is not operating the deputy principal will go to the nearest WiFi hub to send the text message(s) and update the homepage

*Families of those involved in the incident may be excluded to avoid unnecessary distress

Procedures to be followed in the event of Critical Incidents

Short-Term Actions (1st Day) In the absence of P/DP's Cora/Fiona coordinates incident/Acting up Principal

Gather accurate information

It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident; this avoids the proliferation of rumours, which would add to the distress of those involved. The following fact must be established:

- What happened, where and when?
- What is the extent of the injuries?
- What is the location of those injured and not injured?
- How many are involved and what are their names?
- Is there a risk of further injury?
- What agencies have been contacted already?

Contact appropriate agencies

- Emergency services Sec/P/DP
- Medical services Sec/P/DP
- HSE Psychology Departments/Community Care Services Fiona /Cora
- NEPS Cora/ Fiona/Cora
- BOM Maria
- DES & SEC Derval
- Trustees DP/Cora

Convene a meeting with key staff/Critical Incident Team P/DP's/Cora/ Fiona

A list of possible topics to be covered follows:

- Agreeing a statement of the facts for staff, students, parents and the media. There should be a written version of this.
- Delegating responsibilities to the Critical Incident Team.
- Appointing someone to handle phone enquiries and to deal with the media.
- Ensuring that a phone line remains open and available for enquiries.
- Organising the timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important if this is possible).
- Organising a staff meeting, if appropriate.
- Organising the supervision of students during any staff meetings.
- Deciding whether an outside professional be invited to the staff meeting.
- Remind staff that no contact or comment should be made to the media, on social media or within the extended community

Arrange supervision of students.....Irene/ Derval/Maria

Hold staff meeting Jenny & Siobhan

All staff will be asked to attend, including auxiliary staff. It may be necessary to do this in two shifts. The areas which might be covered are listed:

- An account of the facts as known.
- An opportunity for staff to express their views and their feelings.
- Discussion with the staff about how the facts will be shared with the students. (There should be an agreed approach to this if possible).
- An outline of the routine for the day.
- Information for staff about which outside agencies have been contacted or are involved and the supports that will be put in place for both students and staff.
- A procedure for identifying vulnerable students.
- Distribution of relevant handout material.

Organise the timetable for the day.....Derval/Maria

AS FAR AS POSSIBLE MAINTAIN NORMAL ROUTINES.

Inform parents/guardians: Cora

Children directly involved: (Student Support Team)

Parents/guardians will be contacted as soon as possible, and this first contact will be handled with great sensitivity. The steps involved are set out below:

- Agree who should share information with parents and how this should be done.
- Make a list of parents/guardians who have been contacted and those who still need to be told to avoid duplication of messages.
- Give parents/guardians relevant and factual information.
- Set a room aside for distressed students to meet their parents/guardians.
- Provide support to parents who are on their own when they arrive at the school.
- Give telephone numbers for enquiries.

Children not directly involved: Student Support/ Team/year heads.

- The parents of the other children in the school will be informed of the incident and that their child might be upset.
- Communicate to these parents the facts of the incident without naming those involved.

Inform students Irene & Cora/ Fiona.

Careful preparation is important when meeting students to inform them of a critical incident. Consideration should be given to the age of the pupils and the optimum group size. It is best to do it in class groups or sub-groups. The suitability of the 'messenger' should also be considered, remembering that it is generally thought that support is best given by an adult known to the child. Any outside 'expert' might help by assisting the people undertaking this task to prepare for it and by providing ongoing advice and support as they manage it. The nature of the event will clearly have an influence on how students are informed.

The key points/actions in the process are listed below:

- Give facts and avoid speculation. This will help to dispel rumours, which can cause unnecessary stress.
- Allow pupils to ask questions, tell their story and express feelings.
- Help students realise that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident.

Make contact with the bereaved family P/DP//Cora**Dealing with the media** P/DPs NO COMMENT FROM ALL OTHER STAFF

Prepare a written statement to include:

- the facts about the incident
- what has been done already
- what is going to be done
- positive information or comments about the deceased person.

This statement may subsequently appear on the school's website

If asked to give a live interview: P/Chairperson NO OTHER MEMBERS OF STAFF ARE TO TALK TO THE MEDIA

- consider assigning the task to someone skilled or familiar with dealing with the media
- take some time to prepare
- remember that everything you say is on record and, therefore, keep it simple, factual and brief
- decline if you are not ready or think it inappropriate.

Consider setting aside a room for the media. This may help to control their access to staff and students.

Brief staff and students and advise them on dealing with the media.

Organise the reunion of students with their parents, if necessary (student support team)

Inform students that their parents/guardians will be collecting them as soon as possible. Facilitate distressed students and their parents by providing a private room 108.Board room/107.firstaid room where they can meet following an incident. This could be a very emotional time.

Where appropriate offer help with transport, especially for younger children.

Procedures to be followed in the event of Critical Incidents

Medium -Term Actions (24 – 72 Hours) (P and DPs)

Review the events of the first 24 hours

- Reconvene key staff/Critical Incident Team.
- Briefly check out how each person on this team is coping.
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff.
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review staff meeting with all staff if necessary. Ensure all staff are kept up to date on any developments.
- Be sensitive as to how all staff are coping on a personal and professional level.
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Update media, if necessary.

Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary

- Provide a suitable room
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students in order to clarify what has happened.
- Offer advice and reassurance. Inform them about support services and provide relevant handouts.
- 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 reintegration of students and staff (eg absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc.)

Name key person(s) to liaise with above on their return to school.

Plan visits to injured (P/DP)

Name key person(s) to visit home/hospital.

Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service P/DPs/Cora

Designate staff member to liaise with family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service.

Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate.

Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.

Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service

Decide this in accordance with parents' wishes and school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends.

School closure

The school may have to close depending on the circumstances

Procedures to be followed in the event of Critical Incidents

Longer -Term Actions

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress Irene/ Fiona //Cora/student support team/all staff

A referral to the HSE may be necessary. For example, if over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the HSE:

- uncharacteristic behaviour
- deterioration in academic performance
- physical symptoms – eg weight loss/gain; lack of attention to appearance; tiredness; restlessness
- inappropriate emotional reactions
- increased absenteeism.

Evaluate response to incident and amend the Critical Incident 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?
- Consult with the NEPS psychologist and/or the HSE as appropriate.

Amend the plan if required

Inform new staff of pupils affected by earlier Critical Incidents where appropriate

- Ensure that new staff are aware of this plan.
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way.

Dealing with the aftermath of a Suicide or Suspected Suicide

The term ‘suicide’ should not be used until it has been “established categorically that the student’s or teacher’s death was as a result of suicide” (ASTI Guidelines 1997). The phrases ‘tragic death’ or ‘sudden death’ may be used instead.

The following is a guide to how the school can support the bereaved family, school staff and students.

Family

- A staff member should contact the family to establish the exact facts and the family’s wishes about how the death should be described.
- Acknowledge their grief and loss.
- Organise a home visit by two staff members.
- Consult with the family regarding the appropriate support from the school e.g. at the funeral service.

Staff

- Convene a staff meeting to brief staff on the above details. It may be necessary to do this in two shifts therefore ensuring staff are available for support to students and for cover at all times. Include auxiliary staff.
- Students need to be with people they know and trust. If possible, it is better if the teachers provide support for the students. The external “expert” visitor should therefore be primarily used to brief the teachers.
- Help teachers to prepare for breaking the news to students. Close friends and relatives of the deceased in the school need to be told first. This needs to be done in a private location.
- Outline the possible reactions.
- Identify high-risk students and what supports are available.
- Remind them of the school’s critical incident plan.
- Decide on the strategy to deal with queries from parents/guardians. Prepare a letter setting out the facts, how the school is dealing with the events and how parents or guardians can support their child.
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made available for students/staff.
- Hold further staff briefings during the day to update information, to offer support and to further identify high-risk students.

Students

- Give the facts as they are known.
- Create a safe and supportive space for the students where they can share their reactions and feelings.
- Advise them on their possible reactions over the next few days.
- Avoid glorifying the victim and sensationalising the suicide.
- Advise the students of the support that is available to them.
- Take any talk of suicide seriously and provide support or refer on immediately.
- Students may wish to confide in and seek support from each other rather than adults. Facilitate this if appropriate and if it is possible. However, information should be provided about how to get further help if they, or their friends, should need it.

Review

The Board of Management reserves the right to modify this Plan at short notice so as to facilitate an immediate response to an unforeseen event or circumstance where urgent action might be appropriate. This Plan will be reviewed by the Board of Management from time to time.

Implementation

This Critical Incident Plan replaces and supersedes the previous Plan.

This new Critical Incident Plan will apply from 8th September. Elements of this plan will be included in each teacher's handbook. Further, a copy of same will be placed in the Central Resource Library and on the school's website.

Ratified by the Board of Management on the 6th March 2014

Modified 23rd September 2016

Modified 8th September 2023

Modified 20th September 2019

Modified 14th September 2020

Modified 18th September 2021

Modified 13th September 2022

APPENDIX 1

Summary Checklist for Principal and Deputy Principals – Short-term Actions

1. Gather the facts – Who? What? When? And Where?
2. Contact the Critical Incident Team and arrange a meeting
3. Agree a statement of facts
4. Contact appropriate agencies
5. Organise the supervision of students
6. Inform staff
7. Identify high-risk students
8. Inform Parents/Guardians and Students
9. Appoint someone to deal with phone enquiries
10. Organise timetable for the day

MAINTAIN THE NORMAL SCHOOL ROUTINE WHEN AT ALL POSSIBLE

1. Make contact with the bereaved family
12. Organise support
13. Respond to the media.

APPENDIX 2

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

Please display this in the staff room and on the office notice board:

General Emergency Number		112 or 999
Garda	Shannon	061 361212
Ambulance	ENNIS	065 6824464
	LIMERICK	061 228799
Fire Brigade	ENNIS	065 6846302
	SHANNON	999 - for Limerick
Hospital	ENNIS	065 6824464
	LIMERICK	061 301111
Local GPs	Dr. Yvonne Williams	061 705000
	Dr. Peter Flynn	061 364274
	Dr. Ronan Flynn	061 362903
Chairperson of Board of Management		061 471637 & 086 3471076
Clergy/Pastoral Care Presbytery office		061 364133
Fr. Michael Geraghty		087 992 6519
Fr. Tom Whelan		087 273 0299
School Inspector		01 8896553
State Examination Commission		090 6442700
DES – Communications Unit Press Office		061 8892162
Louise Fitzsimon NEPS		065 6865905/087 6529039
NEPS Main Office		01 8892700
HSE – Clare Psychological Services		065 6862754
Child & Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHs)		065 6706601
Health Centre Shannon/ Counselling Services		061 718400
Tusla		065 6897673
Suicide Teresa Crawford		086 8337540
ASTI		01 6040160
TUI		01 4922588

APPENDIX 3

USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS

Barnardos, Limerick	061-430313
The Samaritans	1850 609090
Childline	1800 666666
Parentline	1890 927277
Aware	01-6766166 1890 303302
Rainbows	01 4734175
Pieta House (Suicide/Self Harm)	061 484444
Milford Care Centre Bereavement	061 485800
Childrens Grief Centre	087 9851733

National Suicide Bereavement Support Network:

1850 24 1850 and

<http://www.nsbsn.org>. This Irish website is for people bereaved by suicide and lists support groups.

Contact details for members of the Critical Incident Team

APPENDIX 4

LETTER TO PARENTS (1) - Sample letter in the event of a tragedy

Dear Parents,

The school has experienced *(the sudden death, accidental injury)* of one of our students. We are deeply saddened by the death/events.

(Brief details of the incident, and in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost

)

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. *(Elaborate)*

It is possible that your child may have some feelings that he/she may like to discuss with you. You can help your child by taking time to listen and encouraging them to express their feelings. It is important to give them truthful information that is appropriate to their age.

If you would like advice or assistance, you may contact the following people at the school.
(Details)

Yours sincerely,

APPENDIX 5

LETTER TO PARENTS (2) - Sample letter requesting consent for involvement of outside professional/s

Dear Parents,

Following the recent (tragedy, death of X) we have arranged professional support for students in school who need particular help. (X) is available to help us with this work. This support will usually consist of talking to children, either in small groups or on a one-to-one basis and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate.

Your son/daughter has been identified as one of the students who would benefit from meeting with the psychologist. If you would like your child to receive this support please sign the attached permission slip and return it to the school by.....

If you would like further information on the above or to talk to the psychologist, please indicate this on the slip or telephone the school.

Yours sincerely,

.....

I/We consent to having our daughter/son met by a psychologist employed by the Minister for Education and Science.

I/We understand that my daughter/son may meet the psychologist(s) in an individual or group session depending on the arrangements which are thought to be most appropriate.

Name of student:

Class/Year:

Date of Birth:

I would like my daughter/son to avail of the support being offered by the psychologist.

Signed.....(Parent/Guardian)