



Critical Incident Policy

Our Lady's Girls' NS

Ballinteer Avenue

Dublin 16

19396J

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". Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, their family members or members of the local community e.g.

Examples:

- Death of a member of the school community through accident, violence or unexpected death
- An accident involving members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Outbreak of diseases /major illness
- Criminal incidents
- Major accidents, serious injury
- Suicide or suspected suicide
- Civil unrest, war
- Fire, natural and technological disasters affecting the school
- Disappearance of a member of the school community
- Unauthorised removal of a student from school or home
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff

Aim

The aim of the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) is "to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable them to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to students and staff". Having a good plan will also help ensure that the effects on the students and staff will be limited. It will enable the school to return to normality as soon as possible.

The Critical Incident Management Team shall actively participate in any relevant training or Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities to enhance their effectiveness in managing critical incidents.

Critical Incident Management Team

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Team Leader: | Robbie Murphy | (Principal) |
| Garda Liaison: | Robbie Murphy | (Principal) |

| | | |
|--|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Staff Liaison: | Sinéad McCarthy | (Deputy Principal) |
| | Siobhán Sharkey | (Assistant Principal II) |
| Communication & Media Role: | Robbie Murphy | (Principal) |
| | Sinéad McCarthy | (Deputy Principal) |
| | Siobhán Sharkey | (Assistant Principal II) |
| Student Liaison: | Brenda O'Neill | (Assistant Principal II) |
| | Bernadette Moloney | (Assistant Principal II) |
| Parent Liaison: | Brenda O'Neill | (Assistant Principal II) |
| | Bernadette Moloney | (Assistant Principal II) |
| Administrator: | Linda Monaghan | (Secretary) |
| N.E.P.S.: | Emily Fitzgerald | (National Educational |
| Psychological Service) | | |
| Chairperson of the BoM: | Elizabeth Murray | |
| Parents' Association Nominee: | Emily Kane | |

Team Leader

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident Response Plan and coordinate the tasks of the team
- Express sympathy to the family and liaise with them as appropriate
- Clarify any additional facts surrounding the events - ongoing
- Liaise with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS etc
- Decide in conjunction with the team how the news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, parents etc)
- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts known.

The Deputy Principal will assume this role in the absence of the team leader.

Garda Liaison

- Confirm the event with the Gardaí
- Ensure that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

Staff Liaison

- In conjunction with the principal and the deputy lead, briefing meetings for staff on facts as known

- Give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions
- Discuss with the teachers how the facts will be shared with the pupils in conjunction with Communications liaison officers
- Outline the routine for the day.
- Advise of any cultural/religious sensitivities.
- Advise staff on the procedures for the identification of vulnerable students.
- Provide support for teachers who feel unable to address students/classes.
- Provide materials for staff (from the Critical Incident Folder)

The school will try to maintain normal routines as far as possible.

Communication Liaison - School community, external agencies and the media

- In advance of an incident will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc)
- Will draw up a press statement, (as agreed by school management)
- Will coordinate any communications to the school community via Aladdin, email, Whatsapp groups etc
- Prepare and send out letters, emails
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Liaise where necessary with the INTO
- Liaise with and co-ordinate the involvement of external agencies
- Update team members on the involvement of external agencies

Student Liaison:

- Address the immediate needs of students
- Provide information
- Offer the pupils an opportunity to talk and to listen to them
- To meet privately, if necessary, with individual pupils or small groups who might be particularly upset.
- A designated space/quiet room may be made available for students for a short period, following a tragedy.
- (Some parents may have to be contacted and the students brought home)
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral

- Maintain a list of children seen
- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students

Parent Liaison

- Visit the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arrange parent meetings if required - facilitate such meetings and manage 'questions and answers' in conjunction with communications' team
- Set up a room for meetings with parents
- Meet with individual parents and maintain a record of parents seen
- Manage any 'consent' issues in accordance with the agreed school policy
- Choose appropriate sample letters to parents from the school's system and adapt them as relevant
- Provide appropriate materials for parents (from the Critical Incident Folder)

Administrator

- Maintain up-to-date lists of contact numbers - members of the Parents Council, Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Take telephone calls and note those that need to be responded to
- Forward emails relating to the incident to relevant people
- Check the credentials of individuals offering support
- Remind agency staff to wear name badges
- Ensure that templates are on the school's system in advance and adapt as relevant
- Photocopy materials needed

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 available for students/staff.

Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson

- Protect the family's privacy
- Gather accurate information
- *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?
- Prepare a brief statement (Communications Liaison Officers)
- **Contact appropriate agencies**
 1. Emergency services
 2. Medical services
 3. H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
 4. NEPS
 5. BOM
 6. DES/Schools' Inspector.
- **Convene a meeting with the Key Staff/Critical Management Team (8.00 a.m.)**
 1. Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate. (8.20 a.m.)
 2. Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed.
 3. Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the regular school routine is important if this is possible).
 4. Class teachers are to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information and give to the Student Liaison person.
 5. Arrange supervision of students
- **Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service.**
 1. The Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in the funeral/memorial service.
 2. Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

- Preparation of students/staff attending the funeral.
- 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.
- Ritual within the school.
- **Review the events of the first 24 hours**

1. Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team. (8.00 a.m.)
 2. Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff.
 3. Decide on a mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
 4. Have a review of the Critical Incident Management Team meeting. (3.00 p.m.)
 5. Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
- **Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary.**
 1. Hold support/information meetings for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened.
 2. Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out.
 3. Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission.
 4. Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc)
 5. Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
 - **Plan visits to injured**
 1. Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital.
 2. Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
 3. Decide this in accordance with parents' wishes and 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 family is essential. If over a prolonged period of time, a **student continues to display the following**, he/she may need assistance from the HSE/NEPS.
 1. Uncharacteristic behaviour
 2. Deterioration in academic performance
 3. Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
 4. Inappropriate emotional reactions
 5. Increased absenteeism.
- **Evaluate the response to the incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately.**
 1. What went well?
 2. Where were the gaps?
 3. What was most/least helpful?
 4. Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
 5. Is there any unfinished business?

6. The Critical Incident Team as well as the Board of Management will reflect on the overall process and look at any areas for improvement in dealing with critical incidents.

- **Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future**

1. Consult with NEPS Psychologist

- **Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate**

1. Ensure that new staff are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area.
2. Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way.
3. 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.

- **Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries**

(Be sensitive to special days and events)

1. Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time.
 2. Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
 3. Be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day.
- Plan a school memorial service.
 - Care of the deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
 - Update and amend school records.

The Critical Incident Policy was drawn up by the Board of Management and Critical Incident Team of Our Lady's Girls' National School.

The Policy was reviewed by the Board of Management on March 19th 2024 and will be reviewed annually.

Sínte: Elizabeth Murray
Chairperson Board of Management

Síniú: Polina May
Principal

Dáta: 22 March 2024

Dáta: 22/3/24

Appendices:

Please note the following templates may be more useful in dealing with any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school. These may need to be adapted to address any national or global incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school. The school will follow all national guidelines issued by any Government body in these situations.

Appendix 1: Sample Letter to Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian

The school has experienced *(the sudden death, accidental injury, etc.)* of *Name of student(s)*. We are deeply saddened by the deaths/events.

Our thoughts are with *(family name)*.

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 and questions s/he may like to discuss with you. It is important to give factual information that is age appropriate.

You can help your child by taking time to listen and by encouraging him/her to express feelings. All children are different and will express their feelings in different ways. It is not uncommon for children to have difficulty concentrating or be fearful, anxious, or irritable. They may become withdrawn, cry, complain of physical aches and pains, have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares. Some may not want to eat. These are generally short-term reactions. Over the course of the coming days, please keep an eye on your child and allow him/her to express their feelings without criticism.

Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate that the next few days will be difficult for everyone.

(Optional)

An information night for parents is planned for *(date, time and place)*. At that time, further

information about how to help children in grief will be given.

We have enclosed some information which you may find useful in helping your child through this difficult time.

Young people frequently turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. At these times it is important that you monitor their use and engage with them about what they read. We urge you to emphasise and reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive and careful about what they post.

If you would like advice you may contact the following people at the school. Critical Incident Management Team CIMT

Principal's signature _____

Appendix 2 - Sample Letter to Parents

Dear Parent/ Guardian

I need to inform you about a very sad event that has happened.

A child/young person from the neighbourhood, the sister/ brother of *(name of student)*, a student here at school, was killed as a result of *(a violent attack, violent incident in the street etc.)* earlier this week. We are all profoundly saddened by his death.

We have shared this information and had discussions with all of our students so that they know what has happened. School staff members have been available for students on an ongoing basis today. Other support personnel *(including psychologists etc., according to actual arrangements)* are available to advise staff in their support of students.

The death of any young person is tragic, but a violent death is even more difficult. It is hard to have to teach our children about the violence in our world and to accept that sometimes we do not have the power to prevent it.

This death may cause a variety of reactions in your child. Some children/young people may be afraid for their own life and for the lives of those they love. Take time to listen to their fears and reassure them that what has happened is rare.

We have enclosed some additional information that may be useful during this time.

The media are in the vicinity of the school and may approach you or your children. You need not respond to their questions if you are approached. We will not allow the media to interview your child at school and our general advice is that you should not let your children be interviewed. They are not mature enough to judge what to say and may say something they will regret later.

In these times, young people tend to turn to social media to see what others are saying, or to find out more. While social media can be of great consolation, we would urge you to reinforce the need to be extremely sensitive about what your son/daughter might post to others.

Our thoughts are with *(family name)* and with each of you.

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

| Role | Name | Telephone Number |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Team Leader | Robbie Murphy | |
| Garda Liaison | Robbie Murphy | |
| Staff Liaison | Sinéad McCarthy | |
| Staff Liaison | Siobhán Sharkey | |
| Communication & Media Role | Sinéad McCarthy | |
| Communication & Media Role | Siobhán Sharkey | |
| Student Liaison | Brenda O'Neill | |
| Student Liaison | Bernadette Moloney | |
| Parent Liaison | Brenda O'Neill | |
| Parent Liaison | Bernadette Moloney | |
| Administrator | Linda Monaghan | |
| N.E.P.S.: | Emily Fitzgerald | |

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|---------------------------------|------------------|--|
| Chairperson of the BoM | Elizabeth Murray | |
| Parents' Association Rep | Emily Kane | |

EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

(To be displayed in staff-room, school office and Principal's office)

| AGENCY | CONTACT NUMBERS |
|---|--|
| GARDA | 999 Dundrum: 012983305 |
| HOSPITAL | 999 |
| FIRE BRIGADE | 999 |
| LOCAL GPs | Ballinteer Clinic 01 - 2964649 for Dr. Moloney or Dr. Keane 01 - 2984644 for Dr. Fagan |
| HSE/Primary Care Team / Primary Care Centre /Resource Officer for Suicide Prevention | 1850 24 1850 |
| SCHOOL INSPECTOR | Ursula Cotter |

| | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| NEPS PSYCHOLOGIST | Emily Fitzgerald |
| DES | 01 8896400 |
| INTO | 01 804 7700 1850 708 708 |
| PARISH PRIEST / CLERGY - | 01 499 4203 |
| Spectrum Life Services - EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME | 1800 411 057 1800 776655 (Fórsa) |
| TUSLA Nutgrove | 9213400 |

