



## Critical Incident Policy

Nov 2021.

### Introduction:

In St Joseph's primary School, we aim to protect the wellbeing of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and nurturing environment as outlined in our school philosophy statement.

The BOM through the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has drawn up a critical incident management plan. They have established a Critical Incidents Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

### 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'.

### Examples:

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease
- Criminal incidents
- An accident involving members of the school community.
- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster
- Disappearance of student from home or school - Unauthorised removal of student from school or home.
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies e.g. 9/11, tsunami

### Creation of a coping, supportive and caring ethos in the school

St. Joseph's Primary School have put systems in place to help build resilience in both staff and pupils through our SPHE programmes. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

### Aim

The aim of the CIMP 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. Having a good plan should also help ensure that the impact on students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

### Physical safety:

- Regular fire drills- evacuation plan is followed.



# St. Joseph's Primary School

Roll Number 100471

Macroom, Co Cork

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- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked.
- Supervision in the school from 8.45 to 9.00.
- School doors are fitted with a mechanism that prevents entry by outsiders, during class times. Any visitors to the school are required to check in at school reception.
- The main school gate is closed during the day (Infant school hours)
- All school exit doors are fitted with panic bars.
- Children are encouraged to be gentle at all times.

## Psychological safety:

The management and staff of St. Joseph's Primary School aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of pupils to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

- Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by addressing issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, resilience, conflict management, problem solving, help seeking, bullying, decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- The Friends for Life and Fun Friends programmes are used in the school to help pupils cope with feelings of fear, worry and sadness by building emotional resilience and self-esteem.
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with disclosures.
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas such as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Booklets from Barnardos on these topics area available in school.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- There is a care system in place in the school using the "Continuum of Support" approach which is outlined in the NEPS documents published on 2007 for primary schools.
- Staff is informed about how to access support for themselves.
- The school community works very closely with the psychologist from NEPS that is assigned to our school.

## Critical Incidents Management Team:

Leadership Role: Mrs. Alice Clancy (Principal)

Communication Role: Ms. Cornelia Cronin (Deputy Principal) & Ms. Lisa O'Sullivan (Assistant Principal)

Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: Ms Caitriona Hogan, NEPS Psychologist & Mrs. Marie-Therese O'Callaghan (SPHE co-ordinator)

Chaplaincy Role: Fr John Keane



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Parents Association Rep: Ms. Trish Burton

B.O.M. Rep: Stephan O'Connor (Chairperson of BOM)

The first-named person has the responsibility as defined.

The second-named person assists and only assumes responsibility on the absence of the first-named.

## **Roles and Responsibilities 1. Leadership Role: Intervention**

- Confirm the event  
Activate the Critical Incident response team
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services
- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

## **Postvention**

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- Review Plan

## **2. Communication Role: Intervention**

- With Team, prepare a public statement
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

## **Postvention**

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

## **3. Student Liaison/ Counselling Role:**



## **Intervention**

- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provide information
- Provide counselling
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils

## **Postvention**

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer as appropriate
- Review and evaluate Plan

## **4. Chaplaincy Role:**

### **Intervention**

- Visit home(s), if appropriate
- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff

### **Postvention**

- Provide follow-up support to families in conjunction with Home School Community Liaison
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

## **4. Family Liaison Role:**

### **Intervention**

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident



## Postvention

- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident
- Involve as appropriate the family in school liturgies/memorial services
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan

## 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 for students/staff

## Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Team)
- Protect the family's privacy
- 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?Contact appropriate agencies
  1. Emergency services
  2. Medical services
  3. H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
  4. NEPS
  5. BOM
  6. DES/School Inspector

## 5. BOM

## 6. DES/Schools Inspector

- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team



- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Student Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- 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
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Student Liaison person + Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

## **MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)**

- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- 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 re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
- Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital
- Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
- Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, 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

If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the Health Board. Constant communication with family is essential.

- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism

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?
- Is there any unfinished business?

Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist



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- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
- Ensure that new staffs are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way
- 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)

Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time

- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day

Plan a school memorial service

- Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
- Update and amend school records

Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by Ms Cornelia Cronin. It is available online in Documents on Microsoft 365.

The plan will be updated annually.

Drawn up by the Board of Management of St Joseph' Primary School

Signed  
Chairperson of the Board of Management

Date





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