



# Scoil Mhuire

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## **Critical Incident Policy:**

In Scoil Mhuire we aim to protect the well-being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and well catered environment.

The Board of Management 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
- Major accidents, serious injury
- Suicide
- Fire, natural and technological disaster
- Disappearance of student from home or school
- Unauthorised removal of student/s 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

### **Critical Incidents Management Team:**

Leadership Role: Brian Coleman (Principal)

Communication Role: (Deputy Principal)

Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: Karen Doyle

Chaplaincy Role: Father Mike O'Sullivan

Family Liaison Role: Stephen Sheridan (HSCL)

Parents Association Rep: Rosie Ryan

B.O.M. Rep: Br Phil Ryan

### **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
- Alert staff to 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

### **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**

- Coordinate 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. Board of Management**

- The Board of Management will be kept informed of events at all times.

## **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
- 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
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- Plan a school memorial service
  - Care for the deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
  - Update and amend school records
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- Please see attached Appendix 1: re Roles and Associated Tasks

## **Ratification & Communication**

This policy was reviewed and ratified by the Board of Management on the date below:

**Date presented to Board of Management** \_\_\_\_\_

**Principal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chairperson:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 1:

Roles and their Associated Tasks:

**Team Leader:**

- This is typically the Principal. It needs to be a person with authority in the school and who can make decisions in a crisis.

**Garda Liaison:**

- This is often the Principal. The Garda liaison role involves linking in with the Gardaí to verify the accuracy of the incident details before they are shared. It may also involve ongoing liaison depending on the nature of the incident. For example, if there is an ongoing criminal investigation.

**Staff Liaison:**

- This should be a staff member known and trusted by the staff, usually the school Principal. This staff member will brief the staff on known facts about the incident, give staff members an opportunity to express feelings and to ask questions; provide materials for staff from the CI Guidelines; keep staff updated during the day; be alert to vulnerable staff and advise them of the availability of the employee assistance service (Spectrum Life).

**Student Liaison:**

- This should be a trusted and familiar figure to the students; the role involves alerting staff to vulnerable students; providing materials to students from the CI guidelines; maintaining student contact records; setting up of a 'quiet room' for vulnerable students.

**Community/Agency Liaison:**

- This would be someone with good contacts with agencies and relevant individuals in the community; they liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral; maintain up to date lists of contact numbers of key parents (e.g. members of Parents' Council) and emergency support services; and update CIMT members of the involvement of external agencies.

**Parent/Guardian Liaison:**

- This is a staff member who is well known to parents; this person should be comfortable speaking before a large group and have the skills to manage the emotional reactions of individuals or groups of parents; they will visit the bereaved family with the team leader; may facilitate meetings with groups of parents; ensure that sample letters for parents are prepared; set up rooms for meetings with parents; provide appropriate materials to parents from the CI guidelines.

**Media Liaison:**

- This is someone with good interpersonal skills who would be comfortable talking to the media by phone or in person; in advance of an incident they will consider issues

that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises etc.); they will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews. This role is often taken on by the school Principal or the chairperson of the BOM.

**Administrator:**

- This is often the School Secretary. This role involves maintaining up to date phone numbers of parents, teachers and emergency services; taking telephone calls and noting those that need a response.; ensuring that letter templates are ready on the school IT system; preparing and sending out letters, emails and texts, photocopying materials as required; and maintaining records.