Critical Incident Policy

Managing Critical Incidents Guidance

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Introduction

Whilst they do not occur frequently, Critical Incidents can happen and it is therefore important that we have a plan in place to best respond and manage a traumatic situation should it occur. Critical incident management is an integral part of normal school management practice.

The following information details:

- What is a Critical Incident?
- Who is involved in the Critical Incident Management Team and Roles & Responsibilities
- The Actions to be taken to manage Critical Incident
- Appendices containing useful tools and templates for managing a Critical Incident.

Definition of a Critical Incident

A critical incident may be defined as any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of that school.

What types of critical incidents can affect a school?

- Sudden death of a pupil or member of staff:
- Disappearance of a pupil or member of staff:
- Death or injury of a pupil or staff member on a school outing:
- Severe injury to pupil or staff member as a result of a road traffic accident:

- Serious assault on a pupil or staff member in school:
- Violent/disturbed intruder on school premises during a school day:
- Serious damage to school building or property through fire, flood or vandalism:
- Civil disturbance in local community:
- Pupil with contagious illness:
- Immediate evacuation of the school with no likelihood of return for a number of hours.

For an incident to be declared 'critical' consultations must first take place between the person at the school handling the incident (Principal / Senior Teacher) and a CCMS/EA/DENI representative. In responding to an incident, the aim should always be to ensure that rapid and appropriate action is taken; accurate information is provided; normal school routines are maintained as far as possible and immediate, sensitive and non- intrusive support is offered.

An emergency is difficult to define and the procedures will not apply to all emergencies.

The two most frequent on-site emergencies are likely to be the need to evacuate the building or a serious/fatal accident.

Information Management & Data Privacy:

The following information will be held in school and will be made available to each member of the Critical Incident Management Team:

- Telephone and Mobile Numbers of all staff
- Names of Key Holders
- Significant medical information relating to pupils (Held in medical cabinet First Aid Room)
- Telephone Numbers of Board of Governors
- Contact List of all Critical Incident Support Personnel

This information along with incident reports and details will be maintained in accordance with Data Privacy Guidelines.

Critical Incidents Management Team:

- Principal: Mr Fitzsimons
- Senior Teacher: Mr Doyle
- Secretary: Mrs Milligan
- Co-ordinator of SEN: Miss Byrne
- Chairperson of the Board of Governors: Mr Redmond

Roles and Responsibilities:

Principal:

Intervention

- Confirm the event
- Convene the Critical Incident Management Team
- Contact EA and CCMS (EA Critical Incident Line 02837512515)
- Contact Chair of Board of Governors
- Liaise with emergency services and maintain control until they arrive
- 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)

Review of Intervention

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events e.g. Mass
- Review plan

Communication Role: Principal and Chairperson of the Board of Governors assisted by Senior Teacher

Intervention

- Inform staff
- Inform pupils, as appropriate
- Receive parents coming to school
- Liaise with emergency services as directed by principal
- Keep a log of events
- Prepare a public statement (Press Release)
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies
- 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

Post Intervention

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Involve as appropriate, the family in in-school liturgies/memorial services

Counselling Role: (Principal / SEN Co-ordinator / Pastoral Care Co-ordinator)

Intervention

- Outline specific services available in school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide information
- Provide counselling

Post Intervention

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable pupils
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer on, as appropriate
- Review and evaluate plan

Post Intervention

- Provide follow-up support to families in conjunction with Home School Community Liaison
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)
- Review and evaluate Plan

Action Plan for Dealing With a Critical Incident:

Very often the EA's senior Education officer and his/her team will take over much of the management of the incident, leaving the principal free to deal with pupils, parents and colleagues. In any event, as soon as an incident is declared 'critical', the following plan of action, in order of priority, should be put in place.

Short Term Actions (Day One):

- Firstly, take whatever action necessary to ensure the safety of pupils, staff and any other persons associated with the incident. Contact emergency services as appropriate
- Gather accurate information
  Date, time and location of the incident
  Details of individuals involved
  Brief description of the incident including any unconfirmed reports
  Record of immediate action taken.
- Meet with Critical Incident Management Team
  and Allocate roles to staff members.
  Establish a central information
  point Set-up a dedicated phone
  line
  Inform key people and seek support as appropriate with other relevant agencies e.g. Police, Fire Brigade, School

Nurse, Educational Psychologist & Educational Welfare Officer etc....
Consider the need for an Exceptional School Closure – refer to the Department of Education's Circular 2005/08 for further advice.

- Brief all staff
- Inform all pupils
- Inform all parents
  In very serious circumstances it may be more appropriate for the police to make the initial contact
  Keep a log of who has been contacted and when
  Ensure parents are not left alone in distress
  Protect the family's privacy
- Protect children, parents and staff from publicity, direct all media enquiries to EA /CCMS officer (The only other persons allowed to speak to media are the principal and the Chairperson of Governors)
- Debrief staff at the end of the day
- Meet with Critical Incident Management Team (End of day) and agree plan for following day.

Medium-Term Actions (24-72 Hours):

- Record any further information / details since previous day.
- Maintain central information point.
- Maintain dedicated phone line
- Deal with staff cover
- Brief staff regarding practical arrangements, support for pupils & self-care etc.
- Provide pupils with further information as appropriate.
- Provide further information to parents as appropriate.
- Consider Memorial / Funeral plans if agreed by bereaved family Selection of students/staff to attend funeral
  Involvement of pupils/staff in liturgy if applicable
  Provision of flowers, Mass Cards, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Debrief staff at the end of the day
- Meet with Critical Incident Management Team (End of day) and agree plan for following day

Longer Term Actions:

- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress
- Acknowledge the consequences of the event on children, staff and others
- Provide opportunities for pupils and staff to express their personal reaction to what has happened and to talk about it
- Where necessary make contact with child or colleague at home or in hospital
- Make sensitive arrangements for the return to school of anyone who has been injured/affected
- Inform new staff of which pupils/staff were affected and in what way
- Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries
- Try to re-establish normal routines
- Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Plan appropriately
- Share advice and information about what has happened

1. SUMMARY OF ACTION PLAN:

- As far as possible, make sure staff, pupils and other personnel are safe.
- Contact emergency services
- Inform EA/CCMS/DENI support services and obtain name and direct phone number of the officer delegated to manage the incident
- Keep a log of all events and actions
- Inform Chairperson of Governors
- Contact parents and provide such support as may be required. Stick to the facts and avoid speculation. In very serious situations, it may be preferable for the police to make contact with parents.

No-one can legislate for the unknown, but we hope that by having clear procedures and clear lines of responsibility that we will be in a better position to do the right thing if the time comes. We trust this policy will never be tested.

2. REFERENCES:

- Department of Educations – A Guide to managing Critical Incidents in Schools
- Department of Education's Circular 2005/08

3. APPENDICES:

- Appendix 1: Initial Incident Report
- Appendix 2: Record of Consultations with persons or agencies
- Appendix 2a: Telephone log – callers/query/follow-up
- Appendix 3: General Advice.
- Appendix 4: Letter Templates:
  - a - Letter to staff regarding Critical Incident
  - b - Letter to pupils regarding Critical Incident
  - c - Letter to parents regarding Critical Incident

- Appendix 5: Useful Contacts

Appendix 1

INITIAL REPORT (Confidential)

Date:		**Time:**	
(When report completed)			

Information received from:	
Contact details:	

Name of person informed:	
Information passed to: ***(Name of person with overall responsibility)***	

Date:		**Time:**	
(When incident occurred)			

Facts of incident received so far: **Brief Description of the Incident on (Date)**

Unconfirmed reports:

Details of individuals known to be involved:				
Name	**Pupil/Member of Staff or Local Community**	**Involvement**	**Known/Suspected**	**Contact Details**

IMMEDIATE ACTION:				
Critical Incident Management Team Informed:		*(Time)*		*(Date)*

Name of Person:	

Arrange Meeting of Critical Incident Management Team:		*(Time)*		*(Date)*

Name of Person:	

Appendix 2

RECORD OF CONSULTATION

DATE	NAME OF PERSON	CONTENT OF DISCUSSION	RECOMMENDATIONS

Appendix 2a

TELEPHONE LOG

Date and Time of Call	Name of Caller	Query	Response	Name of staff member to follow up query

Appendix 3

GENERAL ADVICE

- Provide nothing but the facts – Avoid speculation or opinion – it can be inaccurate and upsetting to those involved in the critical incident.
- Express the need to reduce and prevent further stress the need to stabilize the situation normal functioning of the school and its individual members individuals will get the help they need.

- Give a prepared statement rather than an interview and anticipate the worst possible questions. Write it down as it gives you time to think about what you want to say rather than responding in an ad hoc manner.

- Immediately correct any incorrect or misleading information – by interrupting if necessary.

- Offer a written statement which could include an expression of school's grief and what the school has done so far e.g. contact with parents, clergy, Education Authority (EA) support staff etc.

- Do not apportion blame or liability to anyone even in 'off the record' conversations.

- Remember to praise and thank any person or service that have helped during the incident.

- Remember that there are no 'off the record' conversations and that all contact with the press should be treated with caution.

- Report on positive developments following the event. Following a tragic situation, it is important to give the Press information.

Appendix 4

To: All Staff

From: Mr Fitzsimons, Principal

I have just been informed of **(an accident/incident**) involving **(name of pupil or staff member).** It saddens me to announce that **(name of pupil/staff member) has died.**

As more information becomes available, I will pass it on to you. In the meantime, I would ask that students remain in their classrooms and follow their current timetable.

If any pupils feel they need additional support, (**members of the pastoral team, critical incident team, EA Critical Incident Team**) will be available in (**venue**) at (**agreed time**).

Appendix 4a

To: All Pupils

From: Mr Fitzsimons (Pastoral Care Co-Ordinator)

Today I have heard the sad news that **(name of child/staff member)** has died.

The whole school is very shocked by this news and would offer our sympathy to **(name of child/staff member)** family and friends.

This is a very sad time for all of us and we may feel shocked, angry, tearful or numb. At the moment we would like you to stay in your classroom, however, if you feel you need to talk to someone about this news, the school **(pastoral team/critical incident team**) will be available in **(venue)** at **(agreed times).**

Appendix 4b

Dear Parents

I am writing to inform you that today we received the sad news that one of **(our pupils/member of staff)** has died.

As you will be aware this is a difficult time for the whole school community and our (critical incident team/EA critical incident team) are available to help staff and pupils cope with their reaction to this loss.

However, your child may wish to talk to you about some of the thoughts or feelings they are experiencing and I have enclosed an information leaflet which may guide you at this time.

If you would like any further advice or assistance, please contact either myself or any of the following staff:

- Mr Fitzsimons (Pastoral Care Co-Ordinator)
- Maurice Redmond, Chairman, Board of Governors
- Pupil Personal Service, EA

Yours sincerely

Mr Fitzsimons
PRINCIPAL

Appendix 5

Barnardos. Counselling support for children. www.barnardos.org.uk

Childhood Bereavement Network - www.childbereavement.org.uk

Childline - www.childline.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care. Resources and bereavement counselling for children of all ages;

for parents, carers and professionals: www.cruse.org.uk

Family Trauma Centre: www.ftc.hscni.net

Lifeline: 24-hour support and counselling helpline 0808 808 8000.

NEPS: Responding to Critical Incidents Resource Materials for

Schools.neps@neps.gov.ie

NSPCC. Counselling support for children - www.nspcc.org.uk

Samaritans - www.samaritans.org.uk

Winston's Wish - www.winstonswish.org.uk

Resources supporting bereaved children and young people - www.youngminds.org.uk

Other useful websites

www.copewithlife.org.uk

www.papyrus-uk.org

www.selfharm.org

Staff

Staff support

EA Section Human Resources Tel: 028 37512559

Catholic Council for Maintained Schools. Staff Welfare Section Tel:

028 90426972.

Staff Care Services. 24 hour Careline. Freephone: 0500 127079.