

Critical Incident Policy

Scoil Mhuire gan Smal (August 2020)

INTRODUCTION: This Plan was formulated in February 2012, by the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) of Glasheen Girls' School, in consultation with Anne Hales (NEPS), Staff and the Parents, after significant study of supporting resource documentation (Responding to Critical Incidents – Advice & Information Pack for Schools). It was reviewed in 2014. Following the updated publication of 'Responding to Critical Incidents' (2016), there was a further review in December 2016. A copy of the latest publication (November 2018), is available in the Principal's Office.

KEY POINTS: The School Community and the CIMT recognises that procedures to be followed will vary slightly depending on the particular incident that has occurred. The School Community is also satisfied and confident that the Critical Incident Policy will be a vital resource should a CI occur. The CIMT recognises that in the event of a CI, the Resource Documentation listed in the footnotes will most likely also need to be consulted. The contents index for the resource documentation is also listed in the footnotes so as to highlight quickly what the documents offer the CIMT.

RATIONALE: This policy has been developed to enable the whole school to:

- access quickly a useful guide to handling a CI.
- nurture the physical and mental wellbeing of the school community in the aftermath of a school tragedy.
- react quickly and effectively to a critical incident.
- promote a sense of control amongst the school community in the event of a tragedy.
- return to normality and the school routine as soon as possible, whilst still being sensitive to the incident and those affected by it.

Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School.

The policy was developed in the Spirit of Glasheen G.N.S. which is mindful of:

- Educating the whole child, intellectually, emotionally and physically.
- Mental health and its promotion, where mental health is accepted as being defined as. "The emotional and spiritual resilience which enables us to enjoy life and to survive pain, disappointment and sadness" (HEA, 1997).
- Creating a positive environment, where it is understood that tragic incidences do occur, but that they are rare and very much in the minority.
- The Anti-Bullying Policy, the Health and Safety Policy and the Social Personal and Health Education programmes of the school.

Our School's Definition of a Critical Incident. Our School accepts the suggestion of the following definition by NEPS:

A Critical Incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school & disrupts the running of the school.

Examples of a critical incident 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.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community.

The Critical Incident Management Team. The Critical Incident management Team (CIMT) consists of:

- Lorraine Houlihan: Principal, Designated Liaison Person, CIMT Leader, Garda Liaison and Media Liaison.
- Anne Lynch, Chairperson of the Board of Management.
- Ursula Mc Auliffe, (Deputy Principal/Deputy Designated Liaison Person).
- Gemma Desmond, Student Liaison.
- Jacinta O'Brien, Staff Liaison.
- 1. Siobhan Corcoran, Parent and Community Liaison.
- Jane Hyland, Parent Representative.

Roles and responsibilities of the CIMT.

- To maintain an up-to-date list of contact numbers, for teachers, parents and community agencies.
- To compile emergency information for school trips.
- To have a contact phone number in the school for anyone in the school community who needs help who has been affected by a CI. The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) phone is an option for this.
- To organise that the HSCL room be available for students to take a break from class if a student is upset as a result of a CI, and also to parents who might need to talk. To make the Principal's Office the room for media debriefing. To be flexible as to the uses of certain 3 rooms in the instance of a CI, e.g. use of the staffroom/classrooms/resource rooms for meetings should the CI require this.
- Log of events, letters to parents, telephone calls made and received gathered in a folder in the secretary's office.

Evacuation Plan: In the event of an emergency, e.g. fire, the school will need to be evacuated. In this case, students will walk with their class teacher to the assembly area in the yard as practised in regular fire drills. When the alarm is raised or the school assembly bell rings then the teacher gets the roll book and directs the children to the yard in a calm manner. The children will take nothing with them and line up in their class groups in the assembly area and wait for the class roll to be taken. All new teachers are informed of the evacuation plan and maps of the school are available in each classroom and in various suitable locations around the school.

Communication, Availability and Accessibility of the Critical Incident Management Plan.

Each member of the Critical Incident Management Team will have access to the policy on our school website. A folder in the office contains a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident. All teachers have already been e-mailed the relevant information pertaining to their roles in the event of a C.I., and have been e-mailed a copy of the C.I. policy. In the event of an actual C.I. hard copies of the information will be given to teachers. A copy of the policy is available in the school policies folder, in the staffroom and in the office. Staff have been communicated to and are aware of the availability and accessibility of the information. The Referral of affected School Community Members. The CIMT will be mindful of the support systems available and will suggest where necessary to affected School Community Members to seek a consultation with their G.P. in relation to the C.I.

Procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident:

Short-term Actions (1st Day)

- Ensure the safety of students, staff and visitors.
- Convene a meeting of the C.I.M. Team and delegate responsibilities.
- Gather accurate information (incident report form).
- Call Orla Healy from NEPS.
- Identify high-risk students.
- Contact appropriate agencies to organise support.
- Contact the DES and the BOM about the issue.
- Arrange for the supervision of students if necessary.
- Hold a staff meeting and distribute resource material.
- Organise a timetable for the day.
- Inform students and parents.
- Make contact with the affected / bereaved family.

- Report to the Health and Safety Authority, if necessary. As far as possible maintain normal school routine. Medium-term Actions (24-72 hours)
- Convene a meeting of the Critical Incident Management Team to review the events of the first 24 hours to delegate responsibilities.
- Arrange support for students, staff and parents.
- Update staff and students.
- Update the media, if necessary.
- Liaise with the family and clarify the school's involvement in funeral/memorial services.
- Plan visits to the injured.
- Plan for the reintegration of students and staff.
- Assess the roles of the BOM and the Parents' Association.
- Consider the legal and financial consequences.

Longer Term Actions

- Monitor students and staff for signs of continuing distress.
- Plan the long-term counselling needs of individuals.
- Plan for anniversaries and memorials.
- Evaluate the school's response to the critical incident and amend the Critical Incident Policy appropriately.
- Evaluate the effect on the student / teacher relationships.
- Evaluate the long-term effect on the educational progress of students.
- Ensure the new staff are aware of the Critical Incident Policy and are informed of which students/staff were affected in any recent incident.
- Ensure that a report is sent to the new school when a student is transferring.
- Evaluate the legal and financial consequences.
- Report to the BOM, the Trustees, the Parents' Association and the DES. Roles and Responsibilities of members of the CIMT. Team Leader.
- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convene a meeting.
- Co-ordinates the tasks of the team.
- Liaises with the B.O.M., Department of Education & Science and NEPS.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.
- Liaises with the Gardaí.

- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.
- Decides on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries. (The Deputy Principal will take the lead in the absence of the team leader.)

Staff Liaison.

- Leads meetings to brief staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and outlines the routine for the day.
- Advises staff on the identification of vulnerable students and to keep a watchful eye to see if any students continue to show significant signs of distress a number of weeks after the incident. In that case it is vital that the teacher communicates this to one of the CIMT. In the event of a child having prolonged altered behaviour they may need to be referred on to a G.P.
- Keeps the staff updated on changes to the CI through time.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually.
 - Provides materials to staff and ensures everyone is aware of what it is they are required to have and to do.
- Plan for the reintegration of staff. Student Liaison.
- Liaises with other team members to keep them up-dated with information and progress.
- Alerts staff to vulnerable students.
- Provide materials for students where necessary from the resource materials.
- Ensures that a 'quiet' room has been organised for students where necessary.
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff.
- Plan for the reintegration of students. Community Liaison.
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral.
- Updated team members on the involvements of external agencies.
- Co-ordinates the involvement of these agencies.
- Maintains up to date lists of contact numbers of: Key parents, such as members of the parents' council Emergency support services and other external contacts and resources.

Parent Liaison.

- Facilitates "questions and answers" meetings.
- Meets with individual parents.
- Provides materials for parents form the Resource Folder.

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader.
- Manages consent issues in accordance issues with parents for referral to NEPS Psychologist.
- Maintains records of parents seen.
- Ensures sample letters are ready to go.
- Plan for the reintegration of parents.

Media Liaison.

- In preparing for the role, she will consider issues that may arise during an incident and how they might be responded to (e.g. students being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc).
 - In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with the Communications Section in the DES, NEPS and the INTO.
 - Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews.
- Administrative Tasks.
- Maintenance of up to date lists of contact number of
 1. Parents or guardians.
 2. Teachers.
 3. Emergency support services.
 - Telephone calls need to be responded to, letters sent and materials photocopied.
 - Each individual member of the CIMT will keep records of each interaction with another in relation to the CI and amalgamate the information in the CI folder in the secretary's office.
 - Templates are on the secretary's computer system.

Record Keeping.

- In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep detailed records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, materials used etc. Sheila (the School Secretary) will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials etc. All written records of correspondences made to children, parents, the media and agencies made by the designated staff member will be amalgamated in a folder in school office.

Letter to Parents.

- The B.O.M. will prepare a brief, written statement to include:
- The sympathy of the school community for the affected/bereaved family
- Positive information or comments about the deceased/injured persons(s)
- The facts of the incident.

- What has been done.
- What is going to be done. Confidentiality and good name considerations.
- The school has a responsibility to protect the privacy and good name of the people involved in any incident and will be sensitive to the consequences of any public statements. The members of the school staff will bear this in mind and will see to ensure that pupils do so also. (For instance, the term 'suicide' will not be used without the consent of the family involved or until it has been established categorically that the person's death was a result of suicide. The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead).

Monitoring, Review and Evaluation of The Critical Incident Policy

The Committee will review the policy after a CI, should one arise, to see how effective it was as a resource. In each new school year as an induction for new staff and before the formation of a new Board of Management the CI policy will also be reviewed. On-going review and evaluation will take cognisance of changing information, legislation, developments in the school-based programme and feedback from parents/guardians, teachers and students. The policy will be revised as necessary in the light of such review and evaluation and within the framework of school planning Letter Templates.

LETTERS TO PARENTS

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,

Please refer to pages 54 & 55 of '**Responding to Critical Incidents' NEPS Guidelines & Resource Materials for Schools ((2016)**, for more detailed letters and helpful information for parents.

Also, see sections on:

ACTION PLAN FOR PRINCIPAL/TEAM LEADER (Short term, Medium Term & Follow Up) PP. 20 – 31

SUICIDE PP.32 – 39

ROAD TRAFFIC & VIOLENT DEATHS PP. 40 – 43

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA PP. 44 – 47

EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

(Displayed in Secretary's Office, Principal's Office and Staffroom.)

Agency Contact Numbers **Gardai** / Police Bishopstown 021-4541012

CUH Hospital Emergency 021-4920232 / 4920242

Fire Brigade 021-4966333

Local G.P. Dr. Ó Cuill 021-4542633

HSE 1850 2241850

School Inspectorate 01-8896553

NEPS Psychologist 0761108450

Department of Ed & Skills 01-8892700

INTO 1850 708708

Parish Priest 021-4273821

Employee Assistance Service 1800 411 057

Barnardos 021- 4307964

The Samaritans 1850 609090

Childline 1800 666666

Parentline 1890 927277 10

National Suicide Bereavement 024-95561

Rainbows 021-4734175

Bereavement Counselling 01-6767727

I.S.P.C.C. 01-6794944

Aware 1890 303302

(Last Reviewed August 2020)