

# **Critical Incident Policy for Jesus and Mary Primary School**

**Revised November 2022**

## **Overview and Aim**

The goal of the Critical Incident Policy for Scoil Íde, is to provide a caring, safe and supportive environment, which respects the whole school community, so that all those involved will emerge from any critical incident knowing that there are structures in place that will help them deal appropriately with the event. The aim of the Policy 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 effects on the students and staff will be limited. It should enable us to affect a return to normality as soon as possible.

Though the Principal exercises a pivotal role in the school's response to a critical incident, Best Practice recommends the formation of a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) composed of key school personnel, in providing a supportive role. The role of NEPS is to support schools in supporting students and staff.

## **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
- 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
- Intrusion into the school
- A physical attack on a staff member or student

## **Aim of Plan:**

The aim of the Critical Incident Plan is that in the event of such an incident, the plan will help staff and management to react quickly and effectively and to maintain control of the situation. The plan will also help the school to return to normality as soon as possible and limit the effects of the incident on staff and students.

*Leadership Role:* Mrs. Claire Hynes (Principal)

*Staff Liaison:* Mrs. Eileen Ostheimer (Deputy Principal)

*Chaplaincy Role:* Fr. Gerry Jennings

*Family Liaison Role:* Mrs. Claire Hynes (Principal)

*B.O.M. Rep:* Fr. Gerry Jennings (Chairperson of BOM)

*N.E.P.S:* Ms. Christina Burke

*Media Liaison:*            *Principal:* Mrs. Claire Hynes

*Deputy Principal:* Mrs. Eileen Ostheimer

*Administrator:* Andrea Lenihan (School Secretary)

### Leadership Role:

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team
- 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)

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

- With team, prepare a public statement
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

- Outline specific services available in school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Provide information
- Provide counseling

#### Postvention

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

#### **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
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

#### **Family Liaison Role:**

##### Intervention

- Coordinate contact with families (following first contact by the 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 family in-school liturgies/memorial services
- Offer to link family with community support groups if there are any.
- Review and evaluate plan

#### **Administrator's Role**

- Maintenance of up-to-date telephone numbers of:
  - Parents or guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency support services
- Takes telephone calls and notes from those who need to be responded to
- Ensures that letter templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters and /or e-mails and / or messages
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintains records

### ***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: Principal's Office
- Rooms will be made available as follows:
  - Prayer room: Hall
  - Individual Meetings: Principal's Office
  - Parents: Staff Room, Hall

## **Critical incident rooms**

In the event of a critical incident.

- Staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff
- Classroom for meetings with students
- Principal's office for parents
- Principal's office for press
- Resource Rooms for individual sessions with students
- Staff room for other visitors

## **Media Briefing (if appropriate)**

- Designated spokesperson. Principal: Mrs. Claire Hynes
- Prepare a brief statement (Team headed by Mrs. Claire Hynes)
- Protect the family's privacy
- Gather accurate information
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident e.g.
  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.
- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team (e.g. at 8.30 a.m.)
  1. Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate. (e.g. at 9.00 a.m.)
  2. Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed.
  3. Organize timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible).
  4. Class teachers 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, Mrs. Claire Hynes
  5. Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
  1. 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.
- 2. Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Student Liaison Person + Class teacher)
- 3. 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
  1. Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team. (e.g. at 8.30 a.m.)
  2. Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff.
  3. Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
  4. Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting. ( e.g. at 2:45p.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 meeting 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 relative 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 in accordance with parents' wishes and school management 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.
  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 response to 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?
- Formalize the Critical Incident Plan for the future  
Consult with NEPS Psychologist for guidance and advice if necessary
  - 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.
    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 deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
  - Update and amend school records

When responding to Critical Incidents our school will at all times adhere to the latest NEPS Guidelines

- **Responding to Critical Incidents, NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools.**
- <https://www.education.ie/.../Latest-NEPS-publication-Responding-to-Critical-Incidents...>  
Supporting school communities when critical incidents occur

**Responding to Critical Incidents, NEPS Guidelines & Resource Materials for Schools (2016)**

- Also available on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

**Guidance on Social Media Use and Critical Incidents**

For guidance on the use of social media when a critical incident occurs, the NEPS Guidelines (2016) Responding to Critical Incidents pages 89-91 shall be followed.

**Guidance on Teachers Helping Students in time of crisis or emergency**

For guidance on how teachers can help students in time of crisis or emergency refer to the NEPS Guidelines (2016) Responding to Critical Incidents pages 92-94.

### **Guidance for drafting letters to Parents/Guardians/Media**

- Page 54 Sample letter to Parents/Guardians - Sudden Death/ Accident
- Page 55 Sample letter to Parents/Guardians – Violent Death
- Page 56 Sample Announcement to the Media

Note: A template of each of these letters is included here in the following pages to assist the Critical Incident Administrator to forward letters/information without delay when responding to a Critical Incident in our school.

### **SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS – SUDDEN DEATH/ACCIDENT**

This letter can be used as a template for schools when they are informing parents of a tragedy, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves (brief details of the incident and, in the event of a death, perhaps some positive remembrances of the person lost) Where text/social media are used for communicating with parents this content will help with drafting.

(School Contact Details)

(School crest)

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 **(details)**.

Principal's signature

**SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS – SUDDEN DEATH/ACCIDENT SHORTER VERSION**

Dear Parents/Guardians

The school has experienced **(the sudden death/injury)** to one of our students/staff. We are deeply saddened by this death/injury **(Brief details of the incident, and in the case of death, perhaps some positive remembrances of persons lost)**

We have support structures in place to help your child cope with this tragedy. **(Elaborate)**

It is possible that your daughter/son may have some feelings that he may like to discuss with you. You can help your daughter/son by taking time to listen to him/her and encouraging him/her to express his/her feelings. It is important to give truthful information that is appropriate to his/her age.

If you would like any advice or support you may contact the principal Claire Hynes.

**SAMPLE LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS - VIOLENT DEATH**

This letter can be used as a template for schools when they are informing parents of a violent death, offering some advice and outlining what the schools response involves. (Give accurate information about the incident, but avoid using the word murder as this will not be established until the court case is completed).



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 on-going 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. **(Optional)**

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.

Sincerely

Principal

## **SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING CONSENT FOR INVOLVEMENT OF OUTSIDE AGENCIES**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Following the recent **(tragedy/ death of x)** we have arranged specialist support for students in the school who need particular help. **(X)** is available to help us with this work. The support will usually consist of talking to pupils either in small groups or on a one to one basis, and offering reassurance and advice as appropriate

Your daughter has been identified as one of the students who would benefit from meeting with **(X)**. If you would like your daughter to receive this support, please sign the attached permission slip and return it to the school by ..... If you would like further information on the above or if you would like to talk to the psychologist, please indicate this on the slip, or contact the school.

Principal

I/We consent to having our daughter meet with .....

I understand that my daughter may meet x in an individual or group session, depending on the arrangements that are thought most appropriate.

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_.

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

(Parents /Guardians)

### **SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE MEDIA**

This can be used as a template by schools to be emailed, posted on the school social media site or given to the media. It may help to decrease the number of media calls and callers to the school.

In some instances it is not appropriate to provide names or information that might identify individuals.

This announcement will need to be changed based upon confidentiality issues, the wishes of the victim's family and the nature of the incident.

My name is **(Name)** and I am the principal of **(Name)** School. We learned this morning of the death of **(one of our students or Name of student)**. This is a terrible tragedy for the family(ies), our school and our community. We are deeply saddened by these events. Our sympathy and thoughts are with **(Name)** family and friends.

**Name of student/students** was a **(e.g. 5th class girl)** and will be greatly missed by all who knew her. We have been in contact with her parents and they have requested that we all understand their need for privacy at this difficult time.

Offers of support have been pouring in and are greatly appreciated. Our school has implemented our Critical Incident Management Plan.

Psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and **(insert other information if relevant)** have been with us all day supporting and advising teachers in their efforts to assist our students at this time.

The teachers have been helping students to deal with the tragic event.

**The school has been open to parents to support them and to offer them advice and guidance.**

We would ask you to respect our privacy at this time.  
Thank you.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman of Board of Management

Date:

This policy has been drawn up by the staff of Jesus and Mary Primary School in 2014 and sanctioned by the Board of Management of the school. It was revised in 2016.

It was revised again in November 2017. A further review took place in 2019. It was revised again in August 2020 and November 2022