



Scoil Náisiúnta  
Baile Átha Cliath 7  
Ag Foghlaim le Chéile

Dublin 7 Educate Together  
National School

## Critical Incident Policy

# Introduction

Dublin 7 Educate Together NS aims to protect the well being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, respectful and well catered for environment.

The BoM through the Principal, the Staff and the PTA has drawn up a critical incident management plan. They have established a Critical Incident Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

## Aims and objectives of the Critical Incident Policy

The main objective of this policy, in line with the ethos of Educate Together, is to create a physically and psychologically safe environment for the school community. This will be achieved through the following measures:

- Identifying the vulnerable students and managing the students at risk
- Defining roles and responsibilities for each member of the Critical Incident Management Team
- Setting up of lines of communications within the school as well as with outside agencies
- Planning of the debriefing process
- Provision of post-incident support for the Critical Incident Management Team

## 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'. It is important for the school to identify potential critical incidents and which procedures to follow in each instance. Some crises will have deeper and more long lasting effects than others which can be dealt with more easily. For that purpose the incidents which affect schools are listed below and categorized in different levels according to how critical they are and to the type of response they require: (The following list is not exhaustive.)

### Level 3

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, permanent injury, terminal illness, murder or suicide
- Serious injury or death of a person on the school premises
- A physical assault on staff member (s) or student(s) on the school premises
- Kidnap

### Level 2

- Criminal incident occurring during school time
- Road traffic accident/Bus crash with no casualties
- Onset of serious illnesses causing distress or trauma

- Serious damages to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc...

## **Level 1**

- Intrusion into the school or criminal incident outside the school hours
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community

## **Creation of a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)**

The CIMT includes the Principal, Deputy Principal and others who would like to be involved. The Principal will play a key role, being responsible for many of the tasks. Some of these tasks need to be carried out on an ongoing basis so that the communication is speedy and effective in the event of an incident. The personnel involved have been selected in terms of their suitability and in terms of their personal and practical skills. The CIMT will meet annually to update and review the plan

## **Critical Incident Management Team:**

Leadership Role: Patricia Clerkin (Principal)

Communication Role: Fionnuala McHugh (Deputy Principal)

Student Liaison/ Counselling Role: Ruth Fitzgerald

Family Liaison Role: Ciara Friel

Parents Association Rep: Ronan Whelan

B.O.M. Rep: Mary Meaney

## **1. Key tasks in the Critical Incident management process**

### **1.1 Maintaining an up-to-date list of contact numbers**

Numbers are available for:

- Students, parents, guardians
- Members of staff
- Emergency support services .

This list is kept in the Secretary's office. The school secretary is responsible for regular updating of the list.

### **1.2 Compiling emergency information for school trips which should include:**

List of students/members of staff involved and teacher in charge

List of mobile phone numbers for accompanying teacher(s)

Up-to-date medical information on pupils with allergies, epilepsy, etc.

## **1.3 Maintaining administration and services such as:**

Telephone (ensure that a line is free for outgoing and important incoming calls)

Rooms for debriefing, parents, quiet room, counselling, etc.

Log of events, letters to parents, telephone calls made and received normally done by the Secretary

Dealing with normal school hours

## **1.4 Dealing with the media**

When dealing with the media the following points should be adhered to:

- Seek permission from the family/families involved
- Inform family of any proposed press release
- Tell them what you are going to say, when and how

The public statement which should be a written statement includes:

- The facts about the incident
- What has been done already
- What is going to be done
- Positive information or comments about the deceased person

Some points to remember if you are asked to give a live interview:

- Consider assigning the task to someone skilled or familiar with dealing with the media.
- Take the time to prepare the interview by asking in advance for an outline of the questions you will be asked
- Remember that everything you say is on record and therefore keep it simple, factual and brief
- Decline it if you feel it inappropriate or you are not ready for it
- Avoid sweeping statements and generalizations
- Avoid being drawn into speculation
- Seek guidance from INTO, FORSA or other body
- Do not answer questions you do not know the answer to
- Do not use "No comment"
- Remember to control access of the media to students and staff
- Consider letting the media inside the school and if yes, set aside a room
- Brief all members of staff and advise them on how to deal with the media and insist that all queries should be referred to the Principal

All staff members should be made aware of the Critical Incident Policy and of the procedures to follow. A plan for evacuation of the school building should be included. All staff members and students should know what to do, where to go and what they should take with them. This plan adheres to the Fire Evacuation Procedures in the Health and Safety Statement.

The Critical Incident Policy should be made accessible to the personnel involved into putting this policy in action, i.e. the Critical Management Team, the school Secretary, etc All members of staff who are new or temporary are required to familiarise themselves with this policy, which is available on the school website but also in hardcopy in the Secretary's office. The Principal and the Deputy Principal also have a copy.

## **2. Action plan**

### **2.1 SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)**

#### **2.1.1 Leadership Role**

##### **Intervention check-list**

Gather the facts. 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?
  - Confirm the event
  - Activate the Critical Incident management team and convene a meeting
  - Ascertain that each member of the CIMT knows his/her responsibilities for this specific incident
  - 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
  - Organise the routine/timetables for the day
  - Arrange supervision of students
  - Organise a staff meeting, if appropriate
  - Make contact with family. Decide if this is done by phone or in person and ascertain what they wish to communicate
  - Express sympathy to family
  - Clarify the family's wishes regarding the school involvement in funeral/memorial services
  - Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate (Student Liaison Officer and class teacher)
  - Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths
  - Clarify facts surrounding event
  - Make contact with other relevant agencies:
    - Emergency services
    - Medical services
    - H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
    - NEPS
    - BOM

- DES/Schools Inspector
- Depending on whether the incident is Level 1,2 or 3, activate the procedure to follow and decide on how the news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, parents, wider community)
- Appoint the school secretary to deal with phone enquiries
- Agree on statement of the facts with CIMT in a written version
- Address the media with the public statement from the CMIT (either outside or inside the school in the designated room)

Adhere to the normal school routine if at all possible.

## **2.1.2 Communication Role**

### **Intervention check-List**

- Address the media with a pre-statement (either outside or inside the school in the designated room)
- With Team, prepare a public statement
- Protect the family's privacy or seek permission from parents/guardians to divulge any information
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Ascertain that all the contact numbers are properly disseminated to all the relevant parties
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies
- Organise rooms for debriefing, parents, quiet room, counselling, etc ...
- Inform students by giving them facts and avoiding speculation. The level of the incident will influence how the students are informed
- Dispell rumours
- Ensure that any absent staff members are kept informed

## **2.1.3 Student Liaison/ Counselling Role**

### **Intervention check-list**

- 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 further information
- Refer to counselling service
- Make students/staff aware of quiet room
- Ensure that all class teachers are taking notes of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends, etc ... or any other relevant information.
- Allow students to ask questions, tell their story and express their feelings

- Help students realize that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal following a critical incident

### **2.1.4 Family Liaison Role**

#### **Intervention check-list**

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school and support from the school in e.g. funeral service
- Liaise with family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service if appropriate
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident
- Make the parents aware of quiet room
- Seek the services of an interpreter/person who can help if the parents/guardians concerned have limited English

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

### **2.2.1 Leadership Role**

#### **Intervention check-list**

- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- Have a review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with the involvement in support meetings a choice of opting out
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group, debriefings or support meetings with parental permission
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Request a decision from school management re. school closure (if appropriate)

Adhere to the normal school routine if at all possible.

### **2.2.2 Communication Role**

#### **Intervention check-List**

- Facilitate students/staff members in responding with sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc ...
- Establish contact with absent members of staff/students

### **2.2.3 Student Liaison/ Counselling Role**

#### **Intervention check-list**

- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/members of staff
- 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
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives, etc ...
- Preparation of students/members of staff attending the funeral
- Facilitate students/members of staff in memorial event if agreed by bereaved family

## **2.2.4 Family Liaison Role**

### **Intervention check-list**

- Liaise with the Student Liaison with regards to re-integration of students and staff
- Plan the visit to the injured. Family Liaison person, class teacher and principal to visit home/hospital. Decision to be made in accordance with parents'/guardians' wishes
- Plan attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service. Decision will be made in accordance with parents'/guardians' wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends

## **2.3 POST-INTERVENTION ACTIONS**

### **2.3.1 Leadership Role**

#### **Post-Intervention check-list**

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

### **2.3.2 Communication Role**

#### **Post-intervention check-List**

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

### **2.3.3 Student Liaison/ Counselling Role**

#### **Post-intervention check-list**

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

### **2.3.4 Family Liaison Role**



### Post-intervention check-list

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

## 2.4 LONG-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?
- Consult with NEPS Psychologist, Caroline Cleary

Inform new staff members about pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate

Ensure that new staff members are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area

Ensure they are aware of which pupils or staff 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, Cultural/Religious events, Mother's Day, and Father's Day

Plan a school memorial event in consultation with the family

Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the family's wishes?

Update and amend school records