



St. Brigid's Girls' National School

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Critical Incident Policy for Saint Brigid's Girls' National School.

What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is described by the National Educational Psychological Services as:

"...any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school"

Critical incidents may involve one or more pupils or staff members, their family members or members of the local community. Types of incidents might include:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide, suspected suicide or other unexpected death
- An intrusion into the school
- An accident involving members of the school community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community
- Abduction of a pupil from school
- National or international incident leading to loss of life.

Aim of this policy.

The aim of this policy is to lay out a plan of action for a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to help school management and staff to react quickly and effectively in the event of an incident, to enable them to maintain a sense of control and to ensure that appropriate support is offered to pupils and staff. Having a good plan will also help ensure that the effects of an incident on the pupils and staff will be limited. It will enable the school to return to normality as soon as possible. This policy is appended to and is incorporated as part of the school's Safety Statement.

Creation of a Coping Supportive and Caring Ethos in the School

The community of Saint Brigid's GNS has put systems in place to help to build resilience in both staff and pupils through our SPHE programmes, thus preparing them to cope with a range of life events. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of the school community.

Physical Safety

In the area of physical safety the school has put in place the following:

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular fire drills occur
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- Secure doors accessed by bell only during school hours

A. O'Shea, Principal. Roll No. 18324c. RCN 20119751.

- General school rules under the school's code of behaviour to ensure all pupils have a safe environment.
- Rules of the playground.
- Health and Safety risk assessments carried out.
- Safety Statement in place and reviewed

Psychological safety

The management and staff of our school use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of pupils, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion. We ensure that vulnerable pupils are identified and monitored. We include Child Protection on the agenda of Board of Management meetings. Staff members are aware of Child Protection procedures in our school. Our school has developed strong links with external agencies and staff are familiar with the procedures for appropriate onward referral.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

- SPHE is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by including issues such as grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, resilience, conflict management, problem solving, seeking help, bullying, decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse, friendship and the development of good social skills. Promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE
- Weaving Well Being is being implemented from 1st to 6th class to enhance positive mental health and well-being in our pupils.
- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school pupil are available
- External expertise is used to reinforce class work, e.g. Accord.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy
- There is a care system in place in the school using the "Continuum of Support" approach which is outlined in the NEPS documents published on 2007 for primary schools and 2010 for post primary schools. See also Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools (2014). These documents are available on www.education.ie
- Staff is informed about how to access support themselves. The number for Inspire Wellbeing is displayed in the staff room.
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and are made aware of supports and services that can be accessed.
- SET Team have a role in providing emotional and wellbeing support to pupils through social skills groups, one to one teaching and through providing access to the sensory room where appropriate

Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

A CIMT has been established in line with best practice. The members of the team were selected on a voluntary basis and will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the

team will meet annually to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has access to the schools Critical Incident Management Folder which include all of the following:

- A copy of the Critical Incident Management Team/and the Key Roles
- An emergency contact list/school staff contact list
- A copy of the duties of each team member
- A copy of the Board of Management members & contacts
- An Action Plan Template.

Key Roles and Responsibilities of the CIMT

- Administrator.
- Community liaison
- Garda liaison
- Media liaison
- Parent liaison
- Pupil liaison
- Staff liaison
- Team Leader

The Following are the Key Responsibilities of Each Role

Team Leader

- Alert the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Co-ordinate the tasks of the team
- Liaise with the Board of Management; DES; NEPS etc.
- Liaise with the bereaved family.

Garda Liaison

- Liaise with the Gardaí
- Ensure that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.

Staff Liaison

- Lead briefing meetings for staff on facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions and outline the routine for the day
- Advise staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provide materials for staff (from the Critical Incident Folder)
- Keep records of pupils seen by external agency staff
- Look after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed
- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually
- Advises them of the availability of the EAS and gives them the contact number.

Community/Agency liaison

- Maintain up to date lists of contact numbers - members of the Parents Association, emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Liaise with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Check credentials of individuals offering support
- Co-ordinate the involvement of these agencies
- Remind agency staff to wear name badges
- Update team members on the involvement of external agencies

Parent Liaison

- Visit the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arrange parent meetings if held - facilitate such meetings, and manage 'questions and answers'
- Set up room for meetings with parents
- Meet with individual parents
- Maintain a record of parents seen
- Manage the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Ensure that sample letters are typed up, on the school's system and ready for adaptation
- Provide appropriate materials for parents (from their Critical Incident Folder)

Media Liaison

- In advance of an incident, will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to (e.g. pupils being interviewed, photographers on the premises, etc.)
- In the event of an incident, will liaise where necessary with relevant teacher unions etc.
- Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews (as agreed by school management)

Administrator

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers for:
 - Parents or guardians
 - Teachers
 - Emergency services
- Take telephone calls and note those that need to be responded to
- Ensure that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepare and send out letters, emails and faxes
- Photocopies materials needed
- Maintain records

Record Keeping

In the event of an incident, each member of the team will keep records of phone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, material used etc. The school secretary will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, etc.

Confidentiality and Good Name Considerations

The management and staff of Saint Brigid's have 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 seek to ensure that pupils do so also. For instance, the term “suicide” will not be used unless there is solid information that death was due to suicide, and that the family involved consents to its use. The phrases, ‘tragic death’ or ‘sudden death’ may be used instead. Similarly, the word ‘murder’ should not be used until it is legally established that a murder was committed. The term ‘violent death’ may be used instead.

Critical Incident Rooms

In the event of a critical incident:

- The Staff Room will be the main room used to meet the staff
- The Assembly Hall for meetings with pupils
- The Parent Room for parents
- The Assembly Hall for media
- The Parents Room for other visitors

Consultation and communication regarding the plan

All staff were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Students and parent/guardian representatives were also consulted and asked for their comments.

Our school's final policy and plan in relation to responding to critical incidents has been presented to all staff. Each member of the critical incident team has a personal copy of the plan.

All new and temporary staff will be informed of the details of the plan by Principal.

The plan will be updated annually in September

What to do in the event of a critical incident.

Short term actions, (Day 1)

- 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 take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc., or any other relevant information. This is given to the Student Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of pupils
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- The 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 and possible. (Student Liaison person + Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson
- Gather accurate information

- Prepare a brief statement

- 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

Medium Term Actions (24-72 Hours)

- Preparation of pupils/staff attending funeral

- Offer of involvement of pupils/staff in liturgy if desired by bereaved family

- Facilitation of pupils/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/pupils/staff

- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable pupils

- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting

- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils

- Arrange support for individual pupils, groups of pupils, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/pupils, 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 pupils 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
- School closure (if appropriate). Request a decision on this from school management.

Longer Term Actions

- Monitor pupils for signs of continuing distress
 - If, over a prolonged period of time, a pupil continues to display the following, she may need assistance from the Health Board. Regular and on-going 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
- 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 pupils/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day
- Plan a school memorial service
- Take care of deceased person's possessions if applicable. What are the parent's wishes?
- Update and amend school records

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Board of Management.

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on the 12th October 2020.

Signed: 
Chairperson of Board of Management

Signed: 
Principal

Date: 12/10/2020 Date: 12/10/20