

*Ballyfin National School
Responding to Critical
Incidents*

Responding to Critical Incidents

A Policy.

What is a Critical Incident

“Any incident or sequence of events which can overwhelm an individual's capacity to cope. It is psychologically traumatic, causing emotional turmoil, cognitive problems and behavioural and social changes.!”

This incident can disrupt the normal copying mechanisms of the school and disrupt 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 affecting schools are listed below.

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, terminal illness or suicide.
- A life altering injury to a pupil or staff member on or off the school premises.
- A physical attack on staff member (s) or student (s) or intrusion into the school.
- Serious damage to school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.
- A missing student/staff member.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community.

Critical Incident Management Team

The personnel selected should be suitable in terms of their personal and practical skills. This team should meet to update and review the plan. In the aftermath of an incident the school can decide on roles and who will be responsible for different tasks.

Team : Principal
Deputy Principal
School Chaplin
Parent from B.O.M.
Parents from Parent's Council
School Secretary
Mental Health Professional
Local Garda.

Procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident

- Day one:** (i) **Gather accurate information.**
(Principal /Deputy Principal to carry out this task).
- Short-Term
Actions
- * What happened, where and when?
 - * What is the extent of injuries.
 - * How many were involved and their names.
 - * Is there a risk of further injury.
- (ii) **Contact Appropriate Agencies.**
(See Appendix 1 & 2 for further details).
- Emergency Services (Hospital).
Medical Services Local G.P.
Health Board Psychology Department.
Community Care Services.
N.E.P.S. B.O.M. School Inspector/DES.
- (iii) **Meeting with Critical Incident Team.**
- Agree on statement of facts for students, parents, media.
 - Delegate jobs to team.
 - Appoint person to the telephone.
 - Keep school open - deal with normal school business.
 - Arrange supervision of pupils.
- (iv) **Hold staff meeting.**
All staff plus ancillary staff should be asked to attend.
The areas which might be covered are listed below.
- * An account of the facts as known.
 - * Opportunity for staff to express their views and feelings.
 - * How will facts be shared with students.
 - * Outline of what has been done so far.
 - * Outline of routine for the day.
 - * Identifying vulnerable students.
 - Distribution of relevant hand - out material.

- (v) **Inform parents/guardians.**
- * Agree who should inform parents and how this should be done.
 - * Make a list of names to be contacted.
 - * Give relevant and factual information.
 - * Set a room aside for distressed students to meet their parents/guardians - Community hall.
 - * Give telephone numbers for enquires.
- (vi) **Children not directly involved.**
- * The parents of other children in the school should be informed of the incident.
 - * Send a letter to parents stating the facts and brief details of the Incident.
- (vii) **Inform students.**
- * Meet in class groups or sub-groups.
 - * Suitability of the “messenger” should be known to the students.
 - * Give facts and avoid speculation.
 - * Allow pupils to ask questions.
 - * Help students realise that overwhelming emotions are natural and normal.
- (viii) **Make contact with the bereaved family.**
- * Two members of the staff should visit the home of the bereaved family.
- (ix) **Dealing with the Media.**
- * Prepare a written statement.
 - * Include : Facts
 - What has been done.
 - What will be done.
 - Positive information about the deceased person.
 - * Remember everything said is on record, keep it simple and factual and brief.
 - * Set aside a room for the media - Meeting room.
 - * Decline if you are not ready or think it inappropriate.
 - * Brief staff and students and advise them on dealing with media.
 - While under the care of our school the media will be asked not to interview or seek opinions from our students.
- (x) **Organise the reunion of students with their parents if necessary.**
- * Inform pupils that parents/guardians will collect them.
 - * Provide private meeting room for distressed pupils and their parents.
 - Community Hall.
 - * Where appropriate, offer help with transport..

**Longer term
Action (i)**

Monitor pupils 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.

- * 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.

(ii) Evaluate response to incident and amend the Critical Incident Management Plan some weeks after incident.

- * What went well?
- * Where were the gaps?
- * What was the most/least helpful.
- * Have all the necessary onward referrals to support services been made?.
- * Is there any unfinished business?.

(iii) Formalise Critical Incident Plan for the future.

- * Consult N.E.P.S. psychologist to formalise plan.

(iv) Inform new staff/new school affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate.

- * Ensure new staff 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 in any incident are transferring to a new school, it would be useful to brief the Principal of the new school.

(v) Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries.

- * Maintain links with the family and discuss families wishes around Month's Mind, birthday, anniversary.

Day 2.
Medium
Term
Actions

- (i) **Review events of the first 24 hours.**
- * Reconvene key staff/Critical Incident Management team
 - * Briefly check out how each person on this team is coping.
 - * Get feedback from teachers on vulnerable pupils.
 - * Ensure all staff are kept up to date.
 - * Update media, if necessary.
- (ii) **Arrange support for individual students, groups of students and parents, if necessary.**
- * Provide a suitable room - Community Hall.
 - * Inform them about support services, provide relevant handouts.
 - * Any teacher feeling uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings should be given the choice of opting out.
 - * Arrange, in consultation with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings on support meetings with parental permission.
- (iii) **Plan for the reintegration of class of students and staff.**
(e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relatives etc).
- * Name key person (s) to liaise with above on their return to school.
- (iv) **Plan visits to injured.**
- * Name key person (s) to visit home/hospital.
- (v) **Liaise with family regarding funeral arrangements, memorial services.**

N.B.

- * Designate staff member to liaise with family, to extend sympathy, and clarify the families wishes regarding the schools involvement in funeral/memorial service.
 - * Arrange a home visit by two members within 24 hours if appropriate.
 - * Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.
- (vi) **Funeral Arrangements.**
(Decide this in accordance with parents wishes and school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends).
- * Consult with family and friends.
 - * Who will attend?.
 - * Prepare pupils in advance (choir).
 - * Involve relevant students in preparations (liturgy reading etc).
 - * Flowers, Book of condolences, Guard of honour.
- (vii) **School closure**
- * Request a decision on this from school management and school inspector.

Emergency Contact List

Garda		057-8621105
Ambulance		057-8621135
Fire Brigade Station		057-8622244
Hospital		057- 8621364
Local GPs	Dr. Ann Gullane	057-8620371
	Dr. Booth	057-8621110
	Dr. D. Horan	057-8662929
Health Board/Child Family Centre Psychologist	Alex Carroll	057-8678476
Chairperson/Chaplin of the Board of Management - Fr Pat Hennessy		057-8755227
School Inspector		
NEPS Psychologist	Mary Peelo	
Local Counselling Services Health Services Executive Midland area.		057-8621135

Useful Numbers

Community Psychology Services

Child & Family Resource Centre,
Dublin Rd. Portlaoise.

Tel: 057-8678476

Contact Alex Carroll - Principal Clinical Psychologist.

Health Services Executive - Midland Area

Community Welfare Officer

Health Centre,
Dublin Rd. Portlaoise.

Tel: 057-8621135

Contact: David Hackett - Acting Superintendent Community Welfare Officer
Laois/Offaly.

Services offered: If you or someone close to you is affected by illness, Employment, retirement, old age or other circumstances which puts you in need of financial assistance, the Community Welfare Officer based in your local Health Centre will explain what entitlements are available to you and how to claim them.

Social Work Services - Community Care.

Child & Family Resources Centre.

Dublin Rd, Portlaoise.

Tel: 057-8678236

Contact: Fergal McDonald - Principal Social Worker - Laois Area.

Services offered : The social worker can work with you on your own, or with you and your family to help find solutions to any difficulties that you may have. Your social worker will talk with you about the issues that are of concern to you.

Community Medical Services

Health Centre,
Dublin Rd, Portlaoise.

Tel: 057-8621135

Contact: Senior Area Medical Officer.

Concluding Comment

This policy statement has been prepared based on conditions existing in the school at the time of writing. It may be altered, revised or updated at a future date so as to comply with any changes in conditions.

All amendments and updates will be recorded in the -

Responding to Critical Incidents.

Signed : Patrick B. Hennessy
Chairperson B.O.M.
Ballyfin N.S

Date : 25/11/2005