

Introduction/Rationale

Critical Incidents happen and it is therefore important that we have a plan in place to best respond and manage a traumatic situation should it occur. Critical incident management is an integral part of normal school management practice. We consider a critical incident to be any event which causes trauma to our school community and overwhelms our normal coping mechanisms.

Aims

- To respond to a critical incident in an informed manner;
- To create a positive, open, communicative climate where the needs of staff and pupils are met in critical incident situations;
- To recognise which incidents may be critical for the school community;
- To create a safe school environment whereby the physical, social and psychological health of pupils and staff is prioritised;
- To monitor and review the policy for dealing with emergencies;
- To promote active coping skills within the curriculum; and
- To establish positive working relationships and dialogue with outside agencies, thus enabling full and effective collaboration in the event of a critical incident.

Critical Incident Team

The Critical Incident Team has responsibility for ensuring the procedures are properly addressed and that a precise response is known by more than one person.

The Critical Incident Team will comprise of:

- Mr C Duddy Principal
- Mr G O'Kane Vice-Principal
- Mrs I Gamble School Secretary
- Fr Farren Parish Priest Trustee Governor
- Mrs M Boyle Chair of Governors.
- Others may be co-opted as necessary

Roles and Responsibilities

Principal/Team Leader

- Confirm that a major incident has occurred e.g. death;
- Mobilise the School Critical Incident Team;
- Convene a meeting to brief staff or prepare a statement to notify staff;
- Prepare a statement for pupils, staff and parents – Appendix 1a, b, c
- Brief Critical Incident Team members, who have specific role
- Liaise with Media – Appendix 2
- Liaise with family of deceased
- Liaise with other parents
- Liaise with External Agencies
- Convene regular meetings with Critical Incident Team
- Liaise with family/families regarding the involvement of the school in funeral arrangements
- Keep school, staff and pupils updated, as appropriate.

Critical Incident Team Members

- Offer immediate, emotional and practical support to staff and pupils for 2 – 5 days following the incident.
- Support teachers in the classroom as they work with bereaved pupils.
- Offer advice and support to Principal/Senior Management Team.
- Carry out the specific tasks assigned to them by the Team Leader.
- Keep notes on any contact –

Procedures

School evacuation:

In the event that the school requires evacuation the fire drill will be sounded. Children will assemble in the school playground as per normal fire drill practice and await instruction to re-enter the building.

If the incident necessitates a full evacuation of the school site children, and staff, will be walked in class lines to the Pastoral Centre in St. Mary's Ardmore.

As this evacuation will involve large groups of children along a narrow footpath the children will be directed down the lane and through the grounds of The Beech Hill Hotel in order to avoid the sharp bend in the road. Teachers will gather the children by the entrance to The Beech Hill to cross safely to the Pastoral centre.

In the event that the danger is from a source outside the school building, all children and staff will be asked to remain in their classrooms at all times until instructed otherwise. This communication will be directed through the internal telephone system or mobile phones, if required. The Vice-Principal will ensure an overview of pupil safety within the secure areas of the school building while the principal and secretary remain in the locked down entrance areas (if it is safe to do so), in order to communicate with the emergency services and required members of the incident team.

Communication

The following information will be available on and off site and held in school by each member of the Critical Incident Team:

- Telephone and Mobile Numbers of all staff
- Names of Key Holders
- Significant medical information relating to pupils and staff on school outings.
- Telephone Numbers of Board of Governors.
- Contact List of all Critical Incident Support Personnel.

Key Actions

- Contact the Principal and all members of Critical Incident Team.
- Assess that all other children are safe.
- Build a profile of the incident e.g. who is most affected and how they are affected.
- Check to see if any individual or group needs immediate attention.
- Assess immediate practical needs.
- If the school requires evacuation the Pastoral Centre will be used. Children will walk in class lines with assigned adults.

Communications

- An agreed factual statement should be provided with reassurance of action being taken at the incident site.
- When talking to relatives use language and tone that alleviates anxiety.
- Contact with families directly affected should be done quickly and sensitively.
- Agree who will talk to relatives and the media.
- It is vital that all adults in contact with children are kept well informed and feel secure in handling comments and questions.
- A schedule for updating them should be arranged e.g. break time, dinner time, end of school day.

- All staff should be cautioned against talking to the media or responding to questions from reporters.

Curricular Links

- Consider in PDMU/Circle Time/Assemblies and other discussions with children about reactions to bereavement, stress and crisis.
- Consider the provision of relevant materials (fiction/non-fiction) for both staff and pupils.
- Ensure that all staff are made aware of plan and receive training as part of SDP.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The policy will be reviewed as part of on-going school development.
After a critical incident a meeting of all staff will be held to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy and to make necessary modifications.

Appendix 1a

To: All Staff

From:

I have just been informed of **(an accident/incident)** involving **(name of pupil or staff member)**. It saddens me to announce that **(name of pupil/staff member) has died.**

As more information becomes available, I will pass it on to you. In the meantime I would ask that students remain in their classrooms and follow their current timetable.

If any pupils feel they need additional support, **(members of the pastoral team, critical incident team, EA – Western Region Critical Incident Team)** will be available
in **(venue)** at **(agreed time)**.

Appendix 1b

To: All Pupils

From: Mr C Duddy (Principal)

Today I have heard the sad news that **(name of child/staff member)** has died. The whole school is very shocked by this news and would offer our sympathy to **(name of child/staff member)** family and friends.

This is a very sad time for all of us and we may feel shocked, angry, tearful or numb. At the moment we would like you to stay in your classroom, however, if you feel you need to talk to someone about this news, the school **(pastoral team/critical incident team)** will be available in **(venue)** at **(agreed times)**.

Appendix 1c

Dear Parents

I am writing to inform you that today we received the sad news that one of **(our pupils/member of staff)** has died.

As you will be aware this is a difficult time for the whole school community and our (critical incident team/EA-WR critical incident team) are available to help staff and pupils cope with their reaction to this loss.

However your child may wish to talk to you about some of the thoughts or feelings they are experiencing and I have enclosed an information leaflet which may guide you at this time.

If you would like any further advice or assistance please contact either myself or any of the following:

- Mrs M Boyle - Chairman, Board of Governors
- Fr. Farren
- Educational Authority – Western Region 028 8241 1287

Yours sincerely

Mr C Duddy
PRINCIPAL

Appendix 2

- Provide nothing but the facts – Avoid speculation or opinion – it can be inaccurate and upsetting to those involved in the critical incident.
- Express
 - the need to reduce and prevent further stress
 - the need to stabilize the situation
 - normal functioning of the school and its individual members
 - individuals will get the help they need.
- Give a prepared statement rather than an interview and anticipate the worst possible questions. Write it down as it gives you time to think about what you want to say rather than responding in an ad hoc manner.
- Immediately correct any incorrect or misleading information – by interrupting if necessary.
- Offer a written statement which could include an expression of school's grief and what the school has done so far e.g. contact with parents, clergy, EA-WR support staff etc.
- Do not apportion blame or liability to anyone even in 'off the record' conversations.
- Remember to praise and thank any person or service that have helped during the incident.
- Remember that there are no 'off the record' conversations and that all contact with the press should be treated with caution.
- Report on positive developments following the event. Following a tragic situation, it is important to give the Press information.