

# Critical Incident Management Policy

**“Our school is a caring Christian community in which pupils have the opportunity to achieve academic excellence and to grow spiritually, emotionally, socially, creatively and physically in a healthy environment”.**

This sense of caring is experienced as a lived reality in our communal response to the tragedies that are encountered in life. The Critical Incident Plan is designed to provide guidance for those whose task it is to manage such incidents and ensures a considered response that will be of benefit to all members of the school community. This policy was devised in consultation with the staff, parents and students of Loreto Abbey and takes cognisance of “Responding to Critical Incidents” - NEPS Guidelines and Resource Materials for Schools 2016, Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools – Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (DES, DOH, HSE 2013).

## **Definition of a Critical Incident**

A critical incident may be defined as any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school. Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members or members of our local community. Types of incidents might include:

- The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, terminal illness, suicide or sudden death.
- An accident involving pupils or staff on or off the school premises.
- Intrusion into the school.
- A physical attack on staff members or students.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident / tragedy in the wider community.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.

Other scenarios may be deemed Critical Incidents at the discretion of the Principal.

## **Aims**

The aim of the policy is to help the 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. The Plan should enable us to effect a return to normality as soon as possible.

## **Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school:**

Systems are in place to build resilience in both staff and students, 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**

The Health and Safety Policy outlines in detail our approach to ensuring the physical safety of both students and staff.

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Fire Drills occur once a term
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked
- CCTV cameras monitor entry to school

### **Psychological Safety**

We aim to use available programmes and resources to address the personal and social development of students, to enhance a sense of safety and security in the school and to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

- SPHE is integrated into the work of the school. It is addressed in the curriculum by examining issues such as well-being, grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and prevention of alcohol and drug misuse. The promotion of mental health is an integral part of this provision.
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools (2017) and the name of the Designated Liaison Person and the Deputy Designated Liaison Person.
- Information is provided on mental health in general and such specific areas as signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- There is a care system in place in the school using the "Continuum of Support" approach (NEPS 2010) and "Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools (2014)".
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies such as NEPS, Lucena and support services.
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy.
- We attempt to be an inclusive and safe place for students who feel different because of their sexuality, their ethnicity, their interests, their talents, their families, etc.

- Staff are informed in the area of suicide awareness and some have attended specialist training.
- Inputs to students by external providers are carefully considered in the light of criteria about student safety, the appropriateness of the content and the expertise of the providers.
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the Guidance Counsellor, concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance and support is provided. Parents are informed and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff are informed about how to access support for themselves through the Employee Assistance Service (Freephone 1800 411057).

### **Key Administrative Tasks**

In order to ensure an efficient response to a Critical Incident, it is essential that the following key administrative tasks are undertaken.

- A list of addresses and phone numbers is updated annually on the VS Software programme and is also available in hard copy from the General Office.
- Staff addresses and phone numbers are updated annually and are available in the General Office. A list of next of kin of all staff members with the appropriate contact numbers is kept in the General Office. The Principal and Deputy Principal have copies of this information on and off site.
- The emergency contact list is updated annually and is contained in Appendix A of this policy.
- Staff organising off site trips are responsible for compiling a list of all students and staff involved in the trip. This information should be completed on the appropriate forms and will be retained in the General Office and on a file in Google Docs. Mobile phone numbers for all teachers involved must be included.
- A medical information form should be completed by the Parents/Guardians of any student participating in any overnight trip from school. Medical forms are retained by the organising teacher for the duration of the trip.
- The Health and Safety Statement is updated on an annual basis.

### **The Critical Incident Management Team (C.I.M.T.)**

The response to a Critical Incident is co-ordinated by the Critical Incident Management Team (C.I.M.T.).

The members of the C.I.M.T. are as follows:

1. The Principal/Team Leader

2. The Deputy Principal who takes on the role of Team Leader in the absence of the Principal
3. Guidance Counsellors
4. Student Support (Chaplain/RE Co-ordinator, Year Head/teacher representative on Student Support Group)
5. Representative of the Board if appropriate.
6. Principal's Assistant

### **Roles of Critical Incident Management Team**

#### **Team Leader (Principal and in the absence of the Principal, the Deputy Principal)**

- Alerts the CIMT to the crisis and convenes a meeting.
- Co-ordinates the task of the team
- Liaises with the Board of Management, Parents' Association, Loreto Education Centre, NEPS, and other outside agencies, DES, SEC (if appropriate) and the general community.
- Liaises with the bereaved family.
- Liaises with the Gardaí and media.
- Ensures that information about deaths or other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared.
- Advises staff on the availability of the Employee Assistance Service and gives the Employee Assistance contact number

#### **Staff Liaison (Deputy Principal – liaises with the Principal)**

- Keeps staff updated as the day progresses.
- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff an opportunity to ask questions and outlines the routine for the day.
- Advises staff on the procedures for the identification of vulnerable children.
- Is alert to vulnerable staff members and makes contact with them individually. Advises them of the availability of the Employee Assistance Service.
- Provides material for staff.

#### **Student Liaison/Parent Liaison (Chaplain/Guidance Counsellors)**

- Co-ordinates information from tutors and Year Heads about students they are concerned about.
- Alerts other staff to vulnerable students.
- Provides material for students.
- Manages parental consent issues and organises parental support.
- Liaises with outside agencies for support and referral.
- Keeps records of students seen by external agencies.
- Collates record of internal student contact. (R1)
- Manages parental consultations.

### **Student Support (Chaplain/R.E. Co-ordinator/Year Head/teacher representatives on Student Support Group)**

- Organise and manage the Quiet Room(s).
- Maintain a record of students attending.
- Organise appropriate rituals – prayer on intercom, lunchtime service, memorials
- Liaise with the family/team leader regarding school involvement with the funeral liturgies.

### **Year Head, Teacher Representative on Student Support Group & Representative of the Board (if appropriate)**

- Roles will be determined by the nature of the incident.

### **Principal's Assistant**

- Maintenance of up to date telephone numbers of parents/guardians, teachers, emergency services.
- Takes telephone calls and notes those who need to be responded to.
- Ensures that templates are on the school's system in advance and ready for adaptation.
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails, and texts.
- Arranges for the photocopying of material needed.
- Maintains records.

### **Procedures to be followed in the event of a Critical Incident occurring**

1. When a critical incident comes to the attention of a member of staff, he/she should **inform** the Principal/Deputy Principal immediately.
2. The Principal **gathers the facts**. Where an incident occurs on a school trip, this will involve liaising with the local authorities.
3. A **meeting of the CIMT** is convened and may follow the following agenda:
  - Share full details of the event
  - Agree on the facts
  - Discuss what agencies are to be contacted
  - Decide on how best to relay factual and appropriate information
  - Plan procedures for the day
  - Discuss issues relating to school routine including closure
  - Discuss how best to communicate news to close friends, students and wider school community
  - Discuss how to identify vulnerable students

- Plan one or two whole school briefings
- Agree on text of letter to be sent to parents and arrange for it to be forwarded to them (Appendix B 1)
- Discuss media statement and appoint person to deal with media enquiries (Appendix B 2)
- Delegate responsibilities to the appropriate Critical Incident team member
- A record should be kept of all students seen by school staff and agencies external to the school. One person is to be appointed to collate these lists (Appendix D Resource 1).
- Notifying members of the Board of Management and the Loreto Education Centre and the Chairperson of the Parents' Association.
- Delegate school personnel to visit the family/ families touched by the crisis.
- Liaising with the various support groups.
- Appointing a person to deal with telephone enquiries.
- Agree the next meeting time for the Critical Incident Management team and for a follow up meeting at the end of the day.

In the event of an incident on a school trip, it will be necessary for the Principal/Deputy Principal to contact the parents of the group immediately with the facts. The dedicated phone line (2718906) will be given for enquiries and support for the teachers involved will be provided. This may involve arranging flights for supplementary staff.

## **DAY 1**

### **4. Informing Staff**

- Inform all staff by phone and/or text alert notifying them of the incident and of a brief staff meeting as early in the day as possible.
- Outline to staff the plan for the day and the support available. As far as possible, a normal school routine will be maintained.
- The common statement of fact is read and explained.
- The Prayer Room (Suaimhneas) and the Concert Hall (if necessary) will serve as the Crisis response room(s).
- Delegated teachers should inform close friends of the deceased separately. Classes should then be informed by delegated teachers.
- Deputy Principal or designated teacher arranges cover for teachers directly involved and frees the crisis response room(s).
- Resource material is provided for staff:

1. A classroom session following a critical incident (Appendix C Resource 5)
  2. Children's understanding and reaction to death according to age (Appendix C Resource 6)
  3. Stages of grief (Appendix C Resource 7)
  4. How to cope when something terrible happens (Appendix C Resource 8)
  5. Reactions to a Critical Incident (Appendix C Resource 9)
  6. Grief after suicide (only used if there is an acknowledgement of the cause of death) (Appendix C Resource 14)
  7. Frequently asked questions (Appendix C Resource 17)
  8. Teachers helping students in a crisis or emergency (Appendix C Resource 23)
- Identify vulnerable students. Plan another up-date staff meeting later. Receive feedback on issues that are arising. At that meeting provide the latest facts as known and outline the schedule for the next day.

## **5. Informing Students**

- The statement should be communicated in a sensitive manner by teachers known to the group. Give the facts as they are known, highlight the supports that are available and indicate the actions that are planned.
- Close friends of the deceased should be informed separately.
- In Junior Cycle, the class of the student should be the first to be told, followed by the other groups within the year. In Senior Cycle, all groups should be told at the same time. Groups should be no larger than normal class size.
- Other classes are then told by their class teachers. Not every class will be traumatised but it is important to acknowledge the loss for the whole school community.
- Opportunities will be provided for prayer and ritual during the day.

## **6. Dealing with the Media**

- The Principal or a delegate will deal with the media. The primary concern at this time is to look after the school community and to protect the privacy of people most affected.
- The Principal should advise students, parents and staff that only the nominated spokesperson will deal with the media.
- A press statement should be prepared and may be placed on the website if deemed appropriate.

## **7. Contact with Affected Family or Families**

- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate.
- Plan visits to those who are injured.
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in the funeral.
- Decide on the school's role in the funeral service following consultation with parents, Board and close school friends regarding these arrangements.

### **DAY 2**

## **8. Meeting with CIMT**

- Review what has been done to date.
- Decide on school closure.
- List tasks for the day and assign roles – media, contact with bereaved family, attendance and participation in funeral service.
- Review the schedule for the day.
- Go through the list of students who may be vulnerable and view how they are doing.
- Develop a plan for monitoring them over the next few weeks.
- Liaise with Parents' Association representatives regarding supports for parents.

### **Meeting with whole staff**

- The Principal outlines the schedule for the day and updates staff on any information from the family, funeral arrangements, etc.
- A representative from NEPS may address the staff.
- Update on any new information and outline schedule for the day.
- Give an opportunity for questions.

## **9. Aftercare**

- Prepare for the return of bereaved students.
- Discuss what the school will do in memory of the student(s). A representative from the school should liaise with the deceased person's family/ies regarding the memorial.
- Discuss what to do with respect to events that the deceased student would have been part of, e.g. the Debs, award ceremonies, how to manage exam results, if applicable.

- Discuss the management of exam results and the return of practical work submitted to the SEC. Notify the SEC of the need to attend to the issuing of results of the deceased.
- Return personal belongings to the family or families. Bereaved parents may find it helpful to visit the school at a later date. This offers the school an opportunity to return the student's personal belongings and/or school work to the family. It may be an idea to put them in a 'memory folder' or 'memory box'.
- Mark the school's calendar in advance with the anniversary date. Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students or staff and they may need additional support at this time.
- Be sensitive to significant days like birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day and Father's Day.
- Evaluate the school's response to the incident and amend the Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately – what went well? Where were the gaps? What was the most/least helpful? Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made? Is there any unfinished business?

Signed:

**(Chairperson)**

Date:

**This policy will be reviewed after each critical incident and/or in 2019/2020.**

## Appendix A

### Emergency Contact Numbers

<b><u>Agency</u></b>	<b><u>Contact Number</u></b>
Dun Laoghaire Gardaí	6665000
Bray Gardaí	6665300
Shankill Gardaí	6665900
Greystones Gardaí	6665800
Blackrock Gardaí	6665200
Wicklow Gardaí	040460140
Supt. Martin Fitzgerald	086 8282427
Dr. Geraldine Holland (School Advisor)	086 8319601
St. Vincent's Hospital	2694533
Dr. Louis Lavelle, Dalkey	2856600
Sheehan Medical Practice, Glasthule	2806908
Loreto Education Centre	2899956
Community Care Services (Dun Laoghaire)	2843579
NEPS Psychologists	076 1108400/17
State Examinations Commission (Examinations & Assessments Manager)	0906442700
Employee Assistance Service	1800 411057

### Local Parishes

Ballybrack	2826404 (P.P.)
Blackrock	2882248 (P.P.) 2882104 (office)
Bray	2868413 (office) 2863955 (C.C.)
Dalkey	2857773 (P.P.) 2859975 (office)
Dun Laoghaire	0877425835 (P.P.) 2804969 (office)
Glasthule	2801226 (P.P.) 6638604
Greystones	2874025 (office) 2874278 (P.P.)
Johnstown	2351416 (office) 0879648800 (P.P.)
Shankill	2822277 (office) 2824425 (P.P.)

## **Appendix B1**

### **Letter to Parents (R2) (Sudden Death/Accident)**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

It is with profound sadness that the Management, staff and students of Loreto Abbey Dalkey have learned of the tragic/sudden death of

\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ was a much loved member of our school community and she will be greatly missed by her class, her teachers and by her many friends.

Our sincere sympathy is extended to the family of \_\_\_\_\_ at this time.

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

Although classes will continue as usual, I anticipate the next few days will be very difficult for everyone.

I enclose some information which you may find useful in helping your daughter at this time.

An Information Seminar for parents is planned for (date, time and place). At that time, information about how to help teenagers in grief will be given.

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 immediate advice, please contact the Guidance and Counselling Department on 2718913.

Yours sincerely

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert Dunne,  
Principal.

## **Appendix B2**

### **Sample Media Statement**

It is with profound sadness that the Management, staff and students of Loreto Abbey Dalkey, have learned of the tragic death of

\_\_\_\_\_.

Our sincere sympathy is extended to the family of \_\_\_\_\_.

On hearing the tragic news the school Critical Incident Management Plan was put into immediate action. The Critical Incident Management Team convened a meeting to ensure that students affected by their loss are cared for adequately. Procedures are in place to ensure that all in the school community affected by this loss are given all the help they need to cope at this time.

The school is offering counselling and support for students affected by the tragedy. Prayer services have been held in school today and students will attend and participate in the funeral service in the coming days in consultation with the family.

At this sad time, our prayers and support are with everyone affected by this tragedy.

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert Dunne,  
Principal.

## **Appendix C**

### **Resource Material**

- R1 Student Contact Record
- R5 Classroom Session following news of a critical incident
- R6 Children's understanding and reaction to death according to age
- R7 Stages of Grief
- R8 How to cope when something terrible happens
- R9 Reactions to a critical incident
- R13 A General Interview Guide for Guidance Counsellors, Chaplains and other designated staff
- R14 Checklist – Students at Risk
- R15 Exploring Suicide Risk and Guidance if Student Expresses Suicide Ideation
- R17 Frequently Asked Questions (Teachers)
- R18 Frequently Asked Questions (Parents)
- R23 Teachers helping students in time of crisis or emergency

