

# Critical Incident Policy



## Ballycanew N.S.

### Introduction

In Ballycanew N.S. we aim to protect the well-being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and well-catered-for environment at all times, as outlined in our school mission statement. St. Enda's NS has proactive measures for wellbeing in place to promote emotional resilience and wellbeing, such as NEPS-recommended frameworks or programs (e.g., the *Continuum of Support* or *Friends for Life*), as well as an active Amber Flag Committee, and a Nurture Room.

The Board of Management, through the principal and staff, has drawn up a critical incident management plan as one element of the school's policies and plans. A Critical Incidents Management Team (CIMT) has been established to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

### Definition of a "Critical Incident"

A critical incident is any event or series of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and impacts the wellbeing of students, staff, or the school community.

Types of critical incidents may include:

- ❖ The death of a member of the school community through accident, violence, suicide or 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 National/global events with potential impact on the school community.
- ❖ Significant incidents involving technology misuse (e.g., cyberbullying with wide-reaching effects).

### Aim

The aim of the CIMP is to help school 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. A good plan should ensure that effects on students and staff will be limited and should help all concerned to return to normality as soon

as possible. Our plan is informed by NEPS guidelines and is designed to provide a structured, supportive response to critical incidents.

#### ***Physical safety:***

- ❖ Our code of behaviour aims to promote positive, constructive behaviour in our school.
- ❖ Our evacuation plan is formulated and termly fire drills are carried out.
- ❖ Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked.
- ❖ Doors are closed after classes enter the building at 9am. The main front door has a magnetic lock to prevent intrusion into the building.
- ❖ It is our policy to stress safety. Farm safety, water safety, rules of the road, fire safety etc. are covered at every class level each year. The stay safe programme is taught from senior infants to sixth class every second school year.

#### ***Psychological safety:***

- ❖ Bullying undermines the quality of education and can cause severe psychological damage. Our anti-bullying policy aims to ensure that bullying is actively discouraged and if an incident should take place, it is dealt with quickly and efficiently.
- ❖ S.P.H.E. is integrated into the work of our school.
- ❖ Staff are familiar with Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures.
- ❖ Books and resources on difficulties affecting primary school students are available in the school.
- ❖ The school utilises a proactive approach, such as early identification of at-risk students through teacher observation and team discussions.
- ❖ Where a student has been identified as being at risk, concerns are explored with the view of providing appropriate assistance and support. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- ❖ The school has links with a number of external agencies.
- ❖ Children are encouraged at all times to approach a member of staff with worries or concerns.
- ❖ The school promotes emotional literacy through structured SPHE programs like *Stay Safe*, *Weaving Wellbeing*, or *Friends for Life*.

#### **Our Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)**

Team Leader	Séamus Dempsey	Principal
Wellbeing Coordinator	Claire O'Donnell	AP2
Staff Liaison	Alison Kavanagh/Julie Robertson	SNA
Student Liaison	Claire O'Sullivan/Donna Hayden	Nurture Room/AP1
Parent Liaison	Mary Kirwan Doyle	Deputy Principal
Community Liaison	Pamela Murphy	AP2
Media Liaison	Séamus Dempsey	Principal
Administrator	Ann Tighe	School Secretary

#### **Roles of the members of the CIMT**

See Appendix One

#### **Action Plan of the CIMT**

See Appendix Two

#### **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 and materials used, etc.

Ann Kehoe, our school secretary, will have a key role in this record-keeping process.

### **Confidentiality and good name consideration**

The management and staff of Ballycanew N.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. Staff will seek to ensure that students do so also. NEPS advice on managing communication, such as avoiding speculation about sensitive incidents and focusing on facts when communicating with students or parents, will be central to this process.

Any use of school social media accounts will be used solely for the publication of approved press releases or communications.

### **Critical incident rooms**

In the event of a critical incident:

- The staff room will be the main room used to meet the staff
- General Purpose room will be used for assembly meetings with the student body, if necessary. The student liaison may meet with each class in their own classroom
- General Purpose room will be used for parents – questions and answers meeting (Resource room to be used in the case of meetings with individual parents)
- A location outside of school will be used for media
- Learning Support rooms will be used for individual/small group sessions with students

There will be a necessity to ensure flexibility in room allocation depending on the nature of the incident. Arrangements for ensuring privacy (e.g., signage or restricted access to areas) will be used as appropriate.

### **Consultation and communication regarding the plan**

- All staff will have completed the online training module provided by NEPS in relation to Critical Incident during the 2024/25 school year.
- 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 plan by team leader, Séamus Dempsey.
- This plan will be reviewed and updated annually.

### **Additional Information**

- Staff and student support will be sought through various outside agencies. This may take the form of counselling through NEPS or private counsellors.
- Support for the school during a critical incident will be sought from agencies including: HSE, AN Garda Síochána, TUSLA, etc)

This Critical Incidents Policy was drawn up by the principal and staff of Ballycanew N.S. and approved by the Board of Management of the school on

Board of Management Chairperson

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Date

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## **Appendix One: Roles of the Members in the CIMT**

The members of the CIMT were selected on a voluntary basis and they will retain their roles for at least one school year. The members of the team will meet annually to review and update this policy and plan. Each member of the team has a dedicated critical incident folder, containing a copy of the policy and plan and materials particular to their role, to be used in the event of an incident.

### **Team Leader**

(Authoritative and decision maker)

- Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting
- Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Liaises with the BOM; DES; NEPS; Parents' Association
- Liaises with the bereaved family

### **Staff Liaison**

(Known, trusted, and liked)

- Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and to ask questions, outlines the routine for the day
- Advises staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students
- Provides materials for staff from critical incident folder
- 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

### **Student Liaison**

(Familiar and trusted figure)

- Identifies vulnerable students and alerts other staff (appropriately)
- Provides materials for students from critical incident folder
- Keeps records of students seen by external agency staff
- Looks after setting up and supervision of 'quiet' room where agreed
- Counselling and monitoring

### **Community Liaison**

(Someone with good contacts – agencies and individuals)

- Network with community agencies
- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Checks credentials of individuals offering support
- Coordinates the involvement of these agencies
- Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies

### **Parent Liaison**

(Known to parents, public speaking skills and skills in managing emotional responses)

- Visits the bereaved family with the team leader
- Arranges parents meetings, if held – facilitates such meetings and manages 'questions and answers'
- Manages the 'consent' issues in accordance with agreed school policy
- Meets parents and maintains records of parents seen
- Provides appropriate material for parents from critical incident folder

### Media Liaison

(Comfortable being interviewed, good interpersonal skills, assertive)

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

### Administrator

- Maintenance of up-to-date telephone numbers of
  - Parents or guardians
  - Teachers
  - Emergency services
- Takes telephone calls and notes those that need to be responded to
- Ensures that templates are on the schools system in advance and ready for adaptation
- Prepares and sends out letters, emails and faxes
- Maintains records (that all records are stored securely in line with GDPR requirements)

### Wellbeing Coordinator

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- Supports the Principal in activating the Critical Incident Management Plan.
- Ensures all actions prioritise the psychological wellbeing of the school community.
- Provides advice to staff on managing classroom discussions and supporting students emotionally.
- Works with NEPS psychologists, local mental health services, and community supports to facilitate a coordinated response.
- Oversees the identification of individuals or groups requiring additional psychological support.
- Participates in a review of the incident response to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

## **Appendix Two: Action Plan of the CIMT**

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

- Gather accurate information
  - Who, what, when, where?
- Convene a CIMT meeting – specify time and place clearly
- Contact external agencies
  - Emergency services
  - medical services
  - H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
  - NEPS
  - BOM
  - DES/School Inspector
- Arrange supervision for students
- Hold staff meeting
  - ensure that any absent staff members are kept informed
- Agree schedule for the day
  - adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible
- Inform students
  - some students may need to be told separately
  - class teachers give list of absentees who might need to be contacted to the Student Liaison
  - ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff
- Compile a list of vulnerable students
- Contact/visit the bereaved family
  - - consult with family regarding appropriate support from school
- Prepare and Agree media statement and deal with media
- Inform parents
- Hold end of day staff briefing

### **MEDIUM TERM ACTIONS (Day 2 and following days)**

- Convene a CIMT meeting to review the events of day one
  - facilitation of staff/students responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
  - Ritual within the school
- Meet external agencies
  - - arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission
  -
- Meet whole staff
  - establish contact with absent staff and pupils
  - decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Arrange support for students, staff, parents
  - plan for re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings etc.
  - Student liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school
  - Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out
- Visit the injured

- Family liaison person and class teacher and principal to visit home/hospital
- Liaise with bereaved family regarding funeral arrangements
  - involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service
- Make decisions about school closure
  - request a decision on this from BOM

#### LONGER TERM ACTIONS (beyond 72 hours)

- Monitor students for signs of continuing distress
  - Uncharacteristic behaviour
  - Deterioration in academic performance
  - Physical symptoms – weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness etc.
  - Inappropriate emotional reactions
  - Increased absenteeism
- Liaise with agencies regarding referrals
  - If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the above signs of continuing distress, he/she may need help from the health Board
  - Constant communication with family is essential
- Plan for return of bereaved student(s)
- Plan for giving of 'memory box' to bereaved family
  - Follow parent's wishes with regard to deceased person's possessions
- Decide on memorials and anniversaries
  - Additional support may be needed on anniversaries
  - Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
  - Be sensitive to significant days such as birthdays, Mother's Day, Christmas and Father's Day
  - Plan a school memorial service
- Review response to incident and amend plan
  - 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?
- Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future
  - - Consult with NEPS
  - Ensure that new staff are aware of the policy and 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

### Appendix 3

#### List of contacts

Gorey Garda Station	<a href="tel:(053)9430690">(053) 943 0690</a>
NEPS Office Wexford	01 8892492
Helen Sprhan - Assigned NEPS Psychologist	0861653983
HSE	(053) 912 3522
Tusla	(053) 9198134