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Critical Incident Management

Responding to Critical Incidents in the School Community

Policy and Plan

Reviewed September 2024

Critical Incident Policy

The purpose of the critical incident protocol is to provide structure for the school in terms of how to respond effectively to various types of trauma in such a way that the needs of the school community are met and the crisis is co-ordinated. The very nature of trauma often leaves us feeling helpless and uncertain as to how to respond, and whilst each case is different, some guidelines are helpful.

The critical incident protocol refers to **Crisis Prevention, Planning and Intervention** in response to trauma and bereavement, whether it is anticipated or sudden - and trauma that occurs on and off school property, with or without injury.

The psychiatric definition of trauma is an event that involves actual or threatened death, injury or threat to the physical integrity of another person, or witnessing an event such as this, or learning of such an event that has been experienced by a family member or other close associate.

A Critical Incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school.

It can

- Brings about a shock effect
- It could be life threatening
- A large group could be involved
- Daily routine is disrupted

A Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) will assume responsibility and notify the whole school community immediately. In more serious situations, the Principal/Deputy Principal/Assistant Principal of the school and the Board of Management will be notified immediately.

Section 1: Introduction

Our Lady of Good Counsel G.N.S. (Johnstown) aims to protect the well being of its students and staff by providing a safe and nurturing environment at all times. (**Appendix 1: Mission Statement**) The Board of Management through the principal, Lisa Breen, has drawn up a critical incident policy and management plan as one element of the school's policy and plan.

The staff and management of this school have formulated a number of policies and procedures to be followed with a view to ensuring the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students, and the creation of a supportive and caring ethos in the school, in ordinary time as well as in the event of a critical incident. They have established a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

Rationale

We as a school community feel that a policy and management plan in this area will prepare us for a sudden event in order that we can act in a manner that is quick and effective.

Aims

- To be prepared to act quickly and effectively in the event of an incident
- To enable us to maintain a sense of control in difficult circumstances
- To ensure that the appropriate support is offered to students and staff
- To ensure that the effects on staff and students will be limited
- To help the school community to return to normality as soon as possible

Definition

This school recognises a critical incident to be “an incident or sequence of events that overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school”.¹ Critical incidents may involve one or more students or staff members, or members of the wider school or local community.

Examples:

- 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

¹ Source: Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools – NEPS. 20070

- An accident/tragedy in the wider school community
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism, etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community

Section 2: Prevention

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

We have put systems in place to help 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:

Our school's Health and Safety audit is carried out on a regular basis and takes account of the following;

- Evacuation plan formulated
- Regular Fire Drills occur (**Appendix 2: Fire Drill Evacuation Procedure**)
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked (Fire Safety update with Summer Works 2010)
- Gates closed during school hours
- School doors closed during class time
- Rules of playground (**See Appendix 3: Code of Behaviour**)

Psychological Safety

The management and staff of this school 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 issues to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Examples:

- Social, personal and health education (SPHE) is integrated into the work of the school. The curriculum addresses issues such as grief and loss; communication skills; stress and anger management; resilience; conflict management; problem solving; help-seeking; bullying; decision making and alcohol and drug prevention. Promotion of mental health is included in this provision. (See NEPS Guidelines pg. 14)
- Staff have access to training for their role in SPHE.
- Staff are familiar with the Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures and details of how to proceed with suspicions or disclosures are familiar to all staff. All Staff members have signed the school **Child Protection Policy**. (**See App. 4**)

- Books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school student are available in the school from the Pastoral Care Team.
- 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 interventions for suicidal students.
- The school has developed links with a range of external agencies e.g. NEPS/HSE/Rainbows. Fifteen members of staff have trained as facilitators in the Rainbow Programme. **(See App. 5 –List of Rainbow trained Staff)**
- 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. **(See Section 7 of Responding to Critical Incidents: Guidelines for Schools)**
- The school has a clear policy on bullying and deals with bullying in accordance with this policy. **(See Appendix 6: Anti-Bullying Policy)**
- There is a Pastoral Care Team (PCT) in existence in the school.
- Students who are identified as being at risk are referred to the designated staff member (PCT), concerns are explored and the appropriate level of assistance is provided. Parents are informed, and where appropriate, a referral is made to an appropriate agency.
- Staff members have been informed about how to access support for themselves e.g. Employee Assistance Service (EAS)/Carecall, Medmark, Rainbows, Console.

Preventative Approaches

The following preventative approaches have been taken in this school;

1. Curriculum

- Anti-Bullying Policy/Pupil-designed Anti-Bullying Charter
- Code of Behaviour
- Circle Time
- Stay Safe Programme
- SPHE School Policy

2. Supports in place

- Pastoral Care Team in the school
- NEPS (See Role of NEPS)
- School Chaplain
- Child and Family Services (Túsla)

3. Physical Environment – (See App. 7)

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 two school years and to a maximum of four. The members of this team will meet termly/ to review and update the policy and plan. Each member of the team has a critical incident folder. This contains a copy of the policy and plan and materials to support their role, to be used in the event of an incident (See Administrative Tasks – NEPS Guidelines pg. 17-18)

Roles

We as a school realise the importance of clearly assigned roles on this team. The team is made up of members of staff, Board of Management, parents and some outside agencies.

The key members on this team are as follows;

- **Team Leader :** Lisa Breen(School Principal)
- **Chairperson of Board of Management:** Mr. Frank Keenaghan
- **Staff Liaison :** Julie Cluskey(Deputy Principal)
- **Pastoral Care Team:** Lisa Walsh/ Sharon Walker Julie Cluskey (Deputy/Assistant Principal)
- **Parent Liaison:** PA- Elaine Bailey
- **School Chaplain:** Fr. John Sinnott/ Fr. Peadar Murney (School Chaplain)
- **Media Liaison:** Lisa Breen(Principal)
- **Administrator:** Muirghen Wall
- **Garda Liaison:** Dermot O' Meara (Community Garda)
- **Community Liaison:** Muirghen Wall
- **Student Contact/s:** Student Council Representatives (if deemed appropriate)

Roles and Responsibilities

ROLE	NAME	KEY RESPONSIBILITIES
Team Leader	Lisa Breen Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Alerts the team members to a crisis and convenes a meeting ✓ Co-ordinates the tasks of the team ✓ Liaises with the Board of Management; NEPS; DES; ✓ Makes decisions (with BOM) on school closure/attendance at a funeral etc. ✓ Liaise with the BNS principal if required
Staff Liaison Deputy Team Leader Pastoral Care Team Co-ordinator The Meadow	Julie Cluskey Deputy Principal Assistant Principal Lisa Walsh Sharon Walker Julie Cluskey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Leads briefing meeting for the staff on the facts as known, gives staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions ✓ Outlines the routines for the day ✓ Advises the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable students ✓ Provides material for staff from their 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 EAS and gives them the contact number. ✓ Looks after the setting up of and supervision of a quiet room ✓ Keeps a record of pupils seen by external agencies

School Chaplain/s	Fr. Peadar Murney Fr. John Sinnott	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provides pastoral care for the school community ✓ Visits the family with the school principal ✓ Liaises with the Team Leader in relation to masses/prayer services if required
Parent liaison	Elaine Bailey David Kelly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Informs the members of the Parents' Association committee ✓ Arranges parent meetings if required ✓ Facilitates such meetings and manages questions and answers if required ✓ Manages the consent issues in accordance with the agreed school policy ✓ Sets up a room for meetings with parents under the direction of the staff liaison ✓ Maintains a record of parents seen ✓ Meets with individual parents if required ✓ Provides appropriate material for parents from their critical incident folder.
Administrator/ Community Liaison	Muirghen Wall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Maintains an up to date list of contact numbers of Staff/Parents/Parents' Association Committee/Key parents/Emergency Support Services/other external contacts and resources ✓ Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral ✓ Is alert to need to check credentials of individuals offering support ✓ Co-ordinates the involvement of these agencies ✓ Reminds agency staff -wear name badges

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Updates team members on the involvement of external agencies ✓ Takes telephone calls and notes those requiring a response/keeps records ✓ Ensures that templates are on the school system in advance and ready for adaptation ✓ Prepares and sends out letters. Emails and faxes/text-a-parent/staff/BOM
Garda Liaison	Gda. Dermot O'Meara Community Garda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Responsible for liaison between the school, the community and the local Garda station ✓ Responsible for any advice of a public order nature
Media Liaison (See NEPS Guidelines pg. 44-47)	Lisa Breen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In advance of an incident , will consider issues that may arise and how they might be responded to e.g. interviews, photographs, reporters on the school grounds ✓ In the event of an accident will liaise with the DES ✓ Will draw up a press statement, give media briefings and interviews as agreed by the school management
Board of Management Representative	Mr. Frank Keenaghan Chairperson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ To inform the BOM members of the incident ✓ To liaise with the team leader ✓ To convene a BOM meeting if a management decision is required e.g. school closure

Note:

All decisions, records of meetings, records of children dealt with by NEPS and statements prepared will be kept in a **Central File for each Critical Incident**. This Central File will be kept in the Principal's Office under lock and key to protect confidentiality, but will be available to any member of the team who may need it.

Record Keeping (See Record Templates NEPS Guidelines)

In the event of an incident each member of the team will keep records of telephone calls made and received, letters sent and received, meetings held, persons met, interventions used, materials used etc. Gay Byrne and Muirghen Keegan will have a key role in receiving and logging telephone calls, sending letters, photocopying materials, text-a-parent etc.

Confidentiality/Ethical Considerations

The management and staff of Our Lady of Good Counsel GNS 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 the students do so also. (For instance the term "suicide" will not be used unless there is solid evidence that this was the cause of death and ALL the family 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;

- **STAFF ROOM** will be the room used to meet staff
- **SEN Room 19** will be used to meet with students
- **SEN Room 17** will be the room used to meet with parents
- **SEN Room 2A** for press
- **SEN Room 20** for individual sessions with students
- **Staff Room** will be used to host visitors
- **Library** will be used for visitors to wait in.

Consultation and Communication (see NEPS Guidelines pg. 18)

All staff, Parents' Association committee, Board of Management members and the school chaplain were consulted and their views canvassed in the preparation of this policy and plan. Our school's final policy and plan in relation to our response to a critical incident has been presented to staff. Each member of the CIMT has a copy in their Critical Incident Folder. All new/temporary/substitute staff will be informed of the details of the plan by the school mentor, Assistant Principal, Ms. Julie Cluskey.

This plan will be reviewed annually and updated if required in the month of October. It will be put to the test annually. (How?)

(See Review of Policy Neps Guidelines pg. 19)

Emergency Contact List

Agency	Contact Details
Gardai Cabinteely Garda Station Kill-o-the-Grange	 01 6665400 01 6665500
Loughlinstown Hospital	01 2825800
Fire Brigade	999
Local G.P /s	Johnstown Medical Centre 01 2855800
HSE/Community Care Team Tivoli Rd. Dun Laoghaire	01 2365200
Cigire	Catherine King
NEPS Psychologist Direct line 01 7074428	N/A
NEPS Critical Incident Rep. NEPS Blackrock Office	2833028
DES	01 8734700
INTO	01 8722533
Local Church Parish Office	01 2855970 (Sacristy) Raymond Harvey –Sacristan ?? no. 01 2351416 –Catherine Hyland
Employee assistance Service	1800 411 057

Rainbows Crumlin	01 4734175
Brenda O'Tiernaigh/Rainbows	087 6868281

Useful Contact Numbers

Barnardos Head Office	01 4530355
Information Centre	01 4549699
The Samaritans	1850 609 090
HELPLINE (Dublin)	01 8727700
CHILDLINE	1800 666 666
PARENTLINE	1890 927 277
AWARE	01 6617211
HELPLINE	1890 303 302
National Office for Suicide Prevention	01 6352139
Bereavement Service	01 6352179
Rainbows (local)	See above
Rainbows (national)	
The Bereavement Counselling Service	01 8754300
CONSOLE	1800 201 890
Bereavement Counselling	See Rainbows and a/a
National Suicide Bereavement Network	info@nsbsn.org

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Section 3: Interventions (See Principal/Team Leader Actions NEPS pg. 20)

Short term Actions – Day 1

Task	Name
1. Gather accurate information Who? What? Where? When?	Team Leader –Lisa Breen
2. Convene a CIMT meeting, specify the time and place clearly (See NEPS Guidelines pg. 22)	Lisa Breen /Gay Byrne/ Muirghen Keegan
3. Contact external agencies	NEPS/HSE/CONSOLE etc.
4. Arrange supervision for students if required	Julie Cluskey/ Lisa Walsh/ Sharon Walker
5. Hold Staff Meeting (See pg. 24)	All staff (Julie Cluskey Dep. Principal)
6. Agree schedule for the day	CIMT /Lisa Breen/F. Keenaghan
7. Inform students (close friends/classmates/special needs students should be told separately) (SEN pupils pg. 26)	Lisa Breen / Julie Cluskey/ Class Teacher/Special Needs Teacher if required
8. Compile a list of vulnerable students	Julie Cluskey and Pastoral Care Team
9. Contact/visit the bereaved family (See pg. 27)	Lisa Breen, Fr. Sinnott. Fr. Murney/Other relevant staff/people
10. Prepare and agree a media statement	Board of Management, Frank Keenaghan, Lisa Breen
11. Inform parents	By letter or by phone Lisa Breen/ Muirghen Keegan
12. Hold end of day staff briefing	Lisa Breen/Julie Cluskey

(See pg. 27/Principal Checklist)	
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Medium Term Actions – Day 2 and following days

Task	Name
1. Convene a CIMT meeting and review the events of the previous day (See pg. 29)	Lisa Breen
2. Meet external agencies	Lisa Breen /Julie Cluskey/F.Keenaghan
3. Meet whole staff (See pg. 29)	Lisa Breen/ Julie Cluskey
4. Arrange support for students, staff, parents	CIMT
5. Visit the injured (if applicable)	Lisa Breen /Fr. Sinnott/Fr. Murney
6. Liaise with bereaved family/ies regarding funeral arrangements	Muirghen Keegan/Julie Cluskey
7. Agree on attendance and participation at funeral service	Board of Management Lisa Breen
8. Make decisions about possible school closure	Board of Management

Follow-up beyond 72 hours (See pg. 30)

Task	Name
1. Monitor students for signs of continuing distress	Class teachers
2. Liaise with agencies regarding referrals	Julie Cluskey–SENCO Lisa Breen The Meadow
3. Plan for return of bereaved	All school community
4. Plan for giving of “memory box” to bereaved	Class Teacher

family if applicable	Pastoral Care Team
5. Decide on memorials/anniversaries	BOM/Staff/Parents
6. Review response to incident and amend plan	Staff/BOM

Reference Documents

When Tragedy Strikes: Guidelines for Effective Critical Incident Management in Schools (INTO/Ulster Teachers' Union 2000)

Responding to a Critical Incident: Pack for Schools (2008)

Responding to Critical Incidents –NEPS Guidelines and Resources for Schools (2016)

School Policy: Child Protection Policy

School Policy: Code of Behaviour

School Policy: Social, Personal and Health Education

School Policy: Staff and Student Wellbeing

Appendix 1:**Introduction**

Our Lady of Good Counsel GNS is a Catholic school where all are welcome. We celebrate difference and reflect principles of equality and diversity. There are 434 pupils on roll to date, 21 teaching staff, one part-time teacher and an administrative principal. There is an SNA team of seven people, two job-sharing secretaries and a caretaker.

Mission Statement

This is a school community where
self-growth,
self-development and
self-expression are
allowed to flourish.

- ✓ To be open to the abundance of the universe
- ✓ Inclusivity
- ✓ Be there and care!
- ✓ Sense of community
- ✓ Give our pupils roots and wings!

Shared Vision Statement

In an ever-changing world, we in Our Lady of Good Counsel GNS will endeavour, through the pursuit of excellence and positive learning experiences to enable each child to develop her full

potential. We will provide an education in a supportive and caring environment, by nurturing a climate of tolerance and acceptance, and a sincere confidence in the beliefs and values stated in our ethos statement.

School Aims:

We hope

- That our pupils will leave this school with the necessary life skills to become confident, and respectful emergent citizens.
- To provide a supportive environment where the needs of all our pupils are met.
- Sense of community.
- Inclusive language and inclusive systems
- Inclusive env. Physical and social
- School compliant with all relevant leg.
- A school community where self-growth, self-development and self-expression are allowed to flourish
- To view the children as central to all our (ed.)endeavors
- Parents as critical to the decision making process
- Community responsible for delivery of an appropriate ed. (principles underpin leg –Ed Act

Review additional information following Critical Incident March 2020.

- New mechanism for communication with staff and parents to be obtained.
- All codes and information to be kept safely for ease of access to IT and phones during a critical incident.

Principal *Lisa Breen*

Date *9/9/24*

Chairperson *A. Keenan*

Date *9th Sept '24.*