

*Coláiste Tognáin*



# CRITICAL INCIDENT POLICY

## Overview

A Critical Incident Policy for the Jes means having a set of procedures in place, so that we can respond as a school community in a caring, supportive way in the event of a Critical Incident occurring. The goal is to provide a caring, safe and supportive environment, which respects the whole school community, so that all those involved will emerge from any critical incident knowing that there are structures in place that will help them deal appropriately with the event.

Though the Principal obviously exercises a pivotal role in the school's response to a critical incident, Best Practice recommends the formation of a Critical Incident Team (CIT) composed of key school personnel, in providing a vital support role. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist<sup>1</sup> assigned to the school also exercises an important role in consultation with the Principal.

Coláiste Iognáid is committed to *Cura Personalis*<sup>2</sup>, the cornerstone of Jesuit Education which is characterized by care for the individual. This is currently evident in the relationship between Jes staff and students, and supported by many other programmes anti-bullying, peer support, SPHE, pastoral care structures and a Pastoral team, links with outside agencies and procedures for referral, and Suicide Prevention Policy<sup>3</sup>.

### Defining a Critical Incident

A Critical Incident is any incident or sequence of events, normally involving death, which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school and disrupts the running of the school. Some typical incidents would be:

- The death of a member of the school community through sudden death, accident, permanent injury, terminal illness or suicide.
- A life threatening accident involving pupils or staff on or off the school premises.
- A physical attack on staff member(s) or student(s) or intrusion into the school causing serious personal injury.
- Serious damage to the school building through fire, flood, vandalism etc.
- The disappearance of a member of the school community.
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community that has a significant impact on the school community.

### Creation of a Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT)

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<sup>1</sup> The general approach which NEPS will follow in relation to a critical incident is, as in any human tragedy, initially to extend sympathy to the Principal and to the school community and then to offer any assistance and advice which is deemed appropriate by the school. This can include participation in the assessment of the significance and impact of the event and assistance to the staff in drawing up a plan of action. NEPS psychologists may also offer to meet staff and parents and may engage in short-term counselling of students.

<sup>2</sup> Characteristics of Jesuit Education No. 2: Jesuit Education insists on "Individual care and concern for each person", emphasises "activity on the part of the student", and encourages "lifelong openness to growth".

<sup>3</sup> Current best practice and policy is immediate reporting of any indication of suicidal behaviour, where all issues of confidentiality are immediately suspended. While the person who has been confided in may seek advice from a colleague on how to approach the problem, it is ultimately accepted that the Deputy-Principal and Principal, would be informed without delay, and they would in turn consult with the parents.

A planning team of key personnel will be formed, with personnel selected in terms of their personal and practical skills. This team will meet annually to update and review the plan. Certain administrative tasks need to be carried out on an ongoing basis so that communication is speedy and effective in the event of a critical incident.

### **Proposed members of the CIMT**

- A) The Principal – Mr. Bernie O’Connell and/or Media/External Person
- B) The Deputy Principal – Ms. Catherine Hickey
- C) The Chaplain – Fr. Brendan McManus S.J.
- D) A Guidance Counsellor- Carmel Madden, Julie O’Sullivan or Elaine Coffey
- E) The Year Head and Form Tutor if it concerns students/ parents.
- F) Senior Staff Representative- Kevin Ryan
- G) Head of the Board of Management- Fr. John Humphreys SJ
- H) Garda Liaison/Community Officer/Fire Brigade Representative if appropriate

### **THE TASKS WHICH THE CIMT COVERS ARE:**

- Team Leader (A) - Alerts the team members to the crisis and convenes a meeting; Coordinates the tasks of the team
- Garda Liaison (B)- Liaises with the Gardaí and ensures that the information about death and other developments is checked out for accuracy before being shared
- Staff Liaison (A, B, C, F) - Leads briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, gives Staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions, outlines the routine for the day, advises staff on the relevant procedures
- Student Liaison (C, D, E)- coordinate information from Tutors and Year Heads about students they are concerned about, alerts other staff to vulnerable students, provides material for students
- Parent Liaison (A) Ensures an up-to-date list of contact numbers of key parents, such as members of the parents council, emergency support services and other external contacts and resources
- Community Liaison (A)- Liaises with agencies in the community for support and onward referral
- Media Liaison (A)- handles all external and media related enquiries

### **Development and communication of the Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP)**

All staff will be consulted and made aware of the school’s critical incident policies and procedures. A plan for evacuation will be included covering where do staff/pupils go, and what should they take with them. This is combined with the Fire Evacuation Procedures, which are part of the Safety Statement. All new and temporary staff will also be informed of the CIMP. A copy of the plan of the school building will be displayed in key places, with exits highlighted, as already required under Health and Safety regulations. A hard copy of the policy will be available in the Staffroom and Principal/Secretary’s office. The Deputy Principal will also have a copy.

# PROCEDURE IN THE EVENT OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

## Section 3

### 3.1 SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (1st Day) - Checklist for the Principal

- Gather the facts<sup>4</sup> – Who? What? When? and Where?
- Contact appropriate agencies/parent(s)/Guardians/BOM/emergency services, etc
- Convene the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) above
- Organise for the supervision of students
- Inform staff
- Inform parents/guardians. Decide if this is by phone or in person.
- Agree on a statement of the facts
- Identify high risk students or other affected persons
- Appoint someone to deal with phone enquiries; normally the Principal's Secretary.
- Organise timetable for the day (goal is to maintain school routine when possible)
- Inform students (If appropriate)
- Make contact with the bereaved family. Ascertain what they wish communicated.
- Organise support. Agree responsibilities of members of CIMT for this specific incident.
- Respond to the media. Permission from the family/(s) involved must be sought. Inform family of any proposed press release. Agree statement with Jesuit Communications Centre (JCC).

### 3.2 MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24 – 72 Hours)

#### Review the events of the first 24 hours

- Reconvene key staff/Critical Incident Management Team.
- Decide on allocation of tasks.
- Briefly check out how each person on this team is coping.
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff.

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident; otherwise rumours will take over and add to the distress of those involved. What happened, where and when? What is the extent of the injuries? What is the location of those injured and not injured? How many are involved and what are their names? Is there a risk of further injury? What agencies have been contacted already?

- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students.
- Have review staff meeting with all staff if necessary. Ensure all staff are kept up to date on any developments.
- Be sensitive as to how all staff are coping on a personal and professional level.
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils.
- Update media, if necessary.

#### **Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary**

- Provide a suitable room/quiet space.
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students in order to clarify what has happened.
- Offer advice and reassurance. Inform them about support services and provide relevant information. (Give any teacher who feels uncomfortable with involvement in support meetings the choice of opting out and ensure that there is support in place for them.)
- Arrange, in consultation with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission.

#### **Plan for the reintegration 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.

#### **Plan visits to injured**

- Name key person(s) to visit home/hospital.
- Agree visits, if appropriate, with family/medical staff.

#### **Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service**

- Designate staff member to liaise with family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service.
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate.
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths.

#### **Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service**

- Decide this in accordance with parents' wishes and school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends.

#### **School closure**

- Request a decision on this from the Chairman of the B.O.M.

### **3.3 LONGER TERM ACTIONS**

#### **Monitor students for signs of continuing distress - A referral to the Health Board may be necessary.**

For example, 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, change in personality, attitude, involvement
- deterioration in academic performance
- physical symptoms – e.g. weight loss/gain; lack of attention to appearance; tiredness; restlessness
- inappropriate emotional reactions
- increased absenteeism.

### **Evaluate response to incident and amend the Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately**

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

### **Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future**

- Consult with the NEPS psychologist and/or the local Health Board Critical Incidents' Team about this.

### **Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate**

- Ensure that new staffs 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 by an incident are transferring to a new school, it would be useful to brief, verbally, the Principal of the new school.

### **Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (be sensitive to special days and events)**

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time.
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family and liaise on any proposed commemoration.
- Be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, Father's Day.

## **3.4 DEALING WITH THE AFTERMATH OF A SUICIDE OR SUSPECTED SUICIDE**

### **Introduction**

When a person dies through suicide, those who know the person experience a deep sense of shock. The unexpectedness of the death and the taboo associated with suicide can leave a school community feeling unsure as to how to proceed. Again, the key to this is planning.

The term 'suicide' should not be used until it has been "established categorically that the student's or teacher's death was as a result of suicide" (ASTI Guidelines 1997). The phrases 'tragic death' or 'sudden death' may be used instead.

The following is a guide as to how a school can support the bereaved family, school staff and students.

### **Family**

- A staff member should contact the family to establish the exact facts and the family's wishes about how the death should be described.
- Acknowledge their grief and loss.
- Organise a home visit by two staff members. Normally either the Chaplain or Pincipal and a member of staff who knows the family / student should be present.
- Consult with the family regarding the appropriate support from the school e.g. at the funeral service.

## **Staff**

- Convene a staff meeting of adequate duration to brief staff on all relevant details. It may be necessary to do this in two shifts therefore ensuring staff are available for support to students and for cover at all times. Remember to include administrative and support staff.
- Students need to be with people they know and trust. If possible, it is better if the teachers provide support for the students. The external “expert” visitor should therefore be primarily used to brief the teachers.
- Help teachers to prepare for breaking the news to students. Close friends and relatives of the deceased in the school need to be told first. This needs to be done in a private location.
- Outline the possible reactions.
- Give them information from the schools pack on dealing with the students in the classroom and on reactions to grief.
- Identify high-risk students and what supports are available.
- Remind them of the school’s critical incident plan.
- Decide on the strategy to deal with queries from parents/guardians. Discuss with family(ies) affected any communication to the public. Prepare a letter setting out the facts, how the school is dealing with the events and how parents or guardians can support their child.
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made available for students/staff.
- Hold further staff briefings during the day to update information, to offer support and to further identify high-risk students.

## **Students**

- Give the facts as they as appropriate.
- Create a safe and supportive space for the students where they can share their reactions and feelings.
- Advise them on their possible reactions over the next few days.
- Avoid glorifying the victim and sensationalising the suicide.
- Advise the students of the support that is available to them.
- Take any talk of suicide seriously and provide support or refer on immediately.
- Students may wish to confide in and seek support from each other rather than adults. Facilitate this if appropriate and if it is possible. However, information should be provided about how to get further help if they, or their friends, should need it.
- Consider the appropriateness of group counselling.

## **Indicators of high risk students**

- Close friends and relatives of the deceased
- Pupils with a history of suicide attempts/self harm
- Pupils who experienced a recent loss, death of a friend or relative, family divorce or separation, break-up with a boyfriend/girlfriend
- Pupils who have been bereaved by a suicide in the past
- Pupils with a psychiatric history
- Pupils with a history of substance abuse
- Pupils with a history of sexual abuse
- Non-communicative pupils who have difficulty talking about their feelings
- Pupils experiencing serious family difficulties, including serious mental or physical illness
- Less able students.

## APPENDIX 1

*Key administrative tasks in the Critical Incident Management process are:*

### ❖ **Maintaining an up-to-date list of contact numbers**

*Numbers are available for:*

- pupils, parents, guardians
- staff
- emergency support services

Agreement should be reached about where lists will be kept and responsibility for regular updating should be clearly assigned.

### ❖ **Compiling emergency information for school trips**

*This should include:*

- list of all pupils/staff involved and teacher in charge
- list of mobile phone numbers for accompanying teacher(s), students and their parents
- up to date medical information on pupils with allergies, epilepsy etc.

The checklist for all educational tours must be completed. This includes the Hazard Identification and control measures, arrangements and insurances, for the trip.

### ❖ **Identifying roles to be fulfilled at the time of a critical incident**

*External liaison with:*

- outside support agencies i.e. emergency service, DES, NEPS, Health Board, Jesuit Communications Centre (JCC) etc.
- parents
- distressed visitors
- the media. (Only the Principal normally)

*Internal care and communication with* (Team addresses this, given the particular incident, when it convenes):

- staff
- students in general (Where appropriate.)
- students more immediately involved or affected.

*Maintaining administration and services such as:*

- telephone (e.g. keeping a line free for outgoing and important incoming calls)
- rooms for debriefing, parents, quiet room, counselling etc.
- log of events, letters to parents, telephone calls made and received normally done by the Principal's Secretary.
- dealing with normal school business.



## Appendix 2

<b>Barnardos</b>	<b>01-4530355</b>
<i>Barnados Bereavement Counselling for Children</i>	<b>021-4310591</b>
<b>The Samaritans</b>	<b>1850 609090</b>
<b>Childline</b>	<b>1800 666666</b>
<b>Parentline</b>	<b>1890 927277</b>
<b>Aware</b>	<b>1890 303 302</b>
<b>National Suicide Bereavement Support Network</b>	<b>024-95561</b>
<b>Rainbows</b>	<b>01 4734175</b>
<b>The Bereavement Counselling Service – Dublin</b>	<b>01-8391766</b>
<b>Bereavement Counselling Service</b>	<b>01-6767727</b>
<b>I.S.P.C.C.</b>	<b>01-6794944</b>

**<http://homepage.eircom.net/~nsbsn>**

**Irish website for people bereaved by suicide, lists support groups.**