

Coláiste Iognáid S.J.  
Critical Incident Policy

2018 - 2019

# 1. Overview

A Critical Incident Policy for Coláiste Iognáid means having a set of procedures in place so the College can respond in a caring and supportive way in the event of a critical incident. The goal is to provide a caring, safe, and supportive environment so that all those involved and affected will have the necessary supports at the time and be aware of supports and structures that will help them deal appropriately with the impact of the event as they go forward.

Coláiste Iognáid is committed to *cura personalis*. This characteristic of Jesuit education focuses on the care of the individual. In the ordinary course of school life *cura personalis* finds expression in the relationship between staff and students, care teams, SPHE, wellbeing, anti-bullying programmes, and links with external agencies.

Though the Principal exercises a pivotal role in the College's response, best practice recommends the formation of a Critical Incident Team (C.I.T.) composed of key personal to help manage the situation. The National Educational Psychological Service (N.E.P.S.) psychologist assigned to the school also exercises an important role supporting and advising the Principal and C.I.T.

## Defining a Critical Incident

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

- The death of a member of the College community through sudden death, an accident, terminal illness, or suicide.
- A life threatening accident involving a student or staff member on or off the campus.
- A physical attack on a staff member(s) or student(s) causing serious personal injury.
- An intrusion onto the campus by an individual(s) causing serious personal harm to student(s) or staff.
- Serious damage to the College campus through fire, flood, or vandalism.
- The disappearance of a member of the College community
- An accident/tragedy in the wider community that has a significant impact on the College community.

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

The C.I.M.T. team consists of

- 1) Chair of the Board of Management
- 2) The Principal –
- 3) The Deputy Principal
- 4) The Chaplain
- 5) Guidance Counsellor
- 6) Appropriate Year Head
- 7) Appropriate external personal – Garda Liaison Officer/Community Garda/N.E.P.S. psychologist

## C.I.M.T. Tasks.

- The Principal will convene a meeting of the C.I.M.T in the event of a critical incident and coordinate necessary tasks and liaise with external agencies.
- The Garda Liaison Officer will liaise between An Garda and the College to ensure that all information is accurate before being shared.
- The Principal, Deputy Principal, and Chaplain will brief the staff on known facts surrounding the incident, provide space for staff reaction and questions, outline the agreed routine for the day(s), and advise staff on relevant procedures.
- Deputy Principal, Chaplain, Guidance Counsellor, and Year Head to liaise with staff about any student about whom there are concerns and ensure this information is shared with teachers.
- The Principal liaises with families and external support agencies.
- The Principal on the advice of the Jesuit Communications Office will deal with any media correspondence.

## 2. Procedure in the Event of a Critical Incident

### 2.1: Short Term Actions (1<sup>st</sup> Day) – Checklist for the Principal

- Gather the facts – who? What? Where? And When?
- Contact appropriate agencies/parents/Guardians/ Chair of BOM/emergency services, etc.
- Convene C.I.M.T team
- Organise for the supervision of students
- Inform staff
- Inform parents/guardians. Decide to do this by phone or in person
- Agree on a statement of facts (liaise with An Garda/family)
- Identify high risk/vulnerable students or other affected persons
- Appoint school secretary to deal with public enquiries – create standard statement and upload to Website (only after speaking with affected family)
- Organise school time (though normal teaching and learning should continue where appropriate.)
- If appropriate inform students.
- Make contact with affected family and ascertain what they wish to be communicated.
- Organise supports.
- Respond to media enquiries in manner desired by affected family

### 2.2: Medium Term Actions (24-72 hrs)

- 1) Review the events of the first 24 hrs.
  - Reconvene C.I.M.T.
  - Check in on Team members
  - Allocate tasks
  - Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/staff/students
  - Hold staff meeting – keep staff up to date and check in on staff.

- Communicate with absent staff and note absent pupils
  - Identify vulnerable students.
- 2) Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary.
    - Provide suitable space for individuals and groups
    - Address students with any updates
    - Arrange, with external agencies, individual and group debriefing and support meetings with parental permission.
  - 3) Plan for the re-integration of students and staff (absentees, injured students, close relatives)
    - Name key person(s) to liaise with above on return to school – Chaplain and Year Head
  - 4) Plan visits to injured
    - Name Key person(s) to visit home/hospital – seek parental/guardian permission
  - 5) Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements
    - Designate a staff member (though generally the Principal and/or Deputy Principal) to liaise with family regarding funeral arrangements and clarify the family's wishes regarding the involvement of the school in the funeral arrangements.
    - Note specific religious traditions
  - 6) Attendance and participation at funeral service
    - Decide this in accordance with the family's wishes.
  - 7) School Closure
    - Request a decision from the Chair of the B.O.M.

### 2.3: Longer Term Actions

- 1) Monitor students for signs of continuing distress. Note students who continue to display
  - Uncharacteristic behaviour, changes in personality, attitude, and involvement in learning and extra-curricular activities.
  - Deterioration in academic performance
  - Physical symptoms – weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance/hygiene, tiredness, restlessness, and inappropriate emotional reactions.
  - Increased absenteeism
- 2) Evaluate management of incident and review C.I.M.T plan as appropriate
  - What went well?
  - Where were the gaps?
  - What was most helpful/least helpful?
  - Have all necessary onward referrals being made?
  - Is there any unfinished business?

- Arrange counselling/support as necessary
  - Invite N.E.P.S to review the school's response to the incident
- 3) Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries, (be sensitive to special days and events)
- Anniversaries and significant dates in the individual(s) life may trigger emotional responses in staff/students so additional supports may be needed at this time.
  - Liaise with families regarding anniversary memorials

### 3. Dealing with the Aftermath of a Suicide or Suspected Suicide

When a person dies through suicide, those who knew the person experience deep shock. The unexpectedness of the death and the circumstances can leave the College community feeling unsure as to how to proceed. The term suicide should not be used even after it has been established that the student/staff member's death was as a result of suicide. The terms 'tragic death' and 'sudden death' should be used instead. The following is a guide to how the College community can support the bereaved and the College community.

#### 3.1: Family

- The Principal should contact the family to establish the exact facts and the family's wishes about how the death should be communicated.
- A visit to the family home by the Principal and Deputy Principal/Chaplain should be made where appropriate.
- Consult with the family regarding the College's involvement with funeral arrangements. And details that should be made public

#### 3.2: Staff

- Convene a staff meeting and brief staff on all relevant details.
- External advisor such as N.E.P.S. psychologist should be available to support staff and advise staff on how to support and comfort students.
- NOTE: Close relatives and friends of the deceased need to be informed before general student body.
- Identify high risk/vulnerable students
- Decide on a strategy on how to advise and address parental concerns. Use website where appropriate.
- Ensure a quiet space is available to the staff.
- Hold further briefings for staff and ensure information regarding vulnerable students is being circulated where appropriate.

#### 3.3: Students

- Give the facts as appropriate and as in line with family wishes.
- Create safe and supportive environment for students where they can share their reactions and feelings.
- Advise them on possible reactions over the course of the following days.

- Avoid glorifying and sensationalising the suicide.
- Advise students of external and internal supports available to them.
- Take any talk of suicide among students very serious and refer immediately to appropriate agencies.
- When students wish to confide in each other rather than an adult this should be facilitated as appropriate. However, inform them of the other sources of help and emphasis the need to share information with staff/parent/guardian any thoughts about suicide.
- Consider if group sharing and counselling is appropriate (External psychologist's opinion should guide College's decision)

#### 3.4 Vulnerable/high risk students.

- Close friends and relatives of deceased
- Pupils with a history of suicide/self-harm
- Pupils who experienced a recent bereavement of a family members, friend, divorce, separation, or break up with boyfriend/girlfriend.
- Pupils who are bereaved by a past suicide
- Pupils with psychiatric illness
- Pupils with history of substance abuse
- Pupils with a history of sexual abuse
- Pupils who find it very difficult to express feelings
- Pupils whose families are facing difficulties such as mental or physical illness of a parent or sibling.

## 4. Development and Communication of the Critical Incident Management Plan (C.I.M.P.)

- All staff should familiarise themselves with the C.I.M.P. New Staff members should be informed of their obligation to familiarise themselves with the content.
- A copy of this Critical Incident Policy should be available via the College website to all parents. A hard copy should be held in Secretary's Office and Staffroom
- Plans of the school buildings and fire/emergency evacuation routes should be posted around the school.
- A list of emergency contact details to be posted in staffrooms and Administration Offices.
- A copy of this Policy to be emailed to all staff through College email.

This Policy was approved by the Board of Management on Monday 06<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

This policy was adopted and signed on Monday 08<sup>th</sup> October 2018

This policy will be reviewed in October 2019

## Emergency and Support Agencies' Contact Details

An Garda: Mill Street, Galway, (091) 538 000

Aware: 72 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2, (01) 661 7211

Bereavement Counselling Service: The Community Hall, Main Street, Baldoyle, Dublin 13,  
01-839 1766

CAMHS: Ballard House, Bóthar Le Cheile, Galway, (091) 548 900

CHILDLINE: 1800 666 666

Emergency Services (Garda, ambulance, fire, and Coast Guard): 112 or 999

Jigsaw: Fairgreen Rd, Galway, (091) 549252

PARENTLINE: 1890 927 277

Rainbows: Loreto Centre, Crumlin Road, Dublin 12, (01) 473 4175

Samaritans: 12 Dock Street, Galway, (091) 561 222 or 116 123